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THE STORY
OF
MY WARDSHIP.

BY MARY CATHERINE JACKSON.

"Looks of familiar love, that never more,
Never on earth our aching eyes shall meet,
Past words of welcome to our household door
And vanish'd smiles, and sounds of parted feet—
Spring! 'midst the murmur of thy flowering trees,
Why, why revivest thou these?"

MRS. HERMANS.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE STORY
OF
MY WARSHIP.

CHAPTER I.

“Ce qu'on a dit de la grâce divine, qui tout à coup transforme les cœurs, peut, humainement parlant, s'appliquer à la puissance de la mélodie; et parmi les pressentiments de la vie à venir, ceux qui naissent de la musique ne sont point à dédaigner.”

MADAME DE STAEL.

LUTHER, speaking of music, remarked, “If God has provided such enjoyment for his creatures here below, what must be the far higher joys, prepared for them in heaven?”

I thought so, as I listened for the first time to the exquisite music of Bellini, performed by those whom Nature and Art had so thoroughly qualified for the task.

Whether the sweet strains woke in me

high and holy aspirations, or the baser feelings of mere sensuous gratification, I did not pause to inquire, I was not then much versed in mental analysis, nor did I care to probe my feelings to the core.

I was half wild as Grisi poured forth in a full stream those rich, soul-thrilling notes, and threw into her part all the concentrated passion of her most passionate nature. At times I could scarcely draw my breath, so enthralled seemed every sense and feeling by the magical effect of her incomparable voice and artistic acting. All the fire, and the fondness, the sadness and sorrow of my heart seemed to wake to life as I listened, and I sat as one entranced, till some commonplace remark from my companion, recalled me to the scene around.

The curtain dropped, and the audience fell to looking about them. I sat back, surveying the tiers of beauties upon beauties, lovely women of whom any country might be proud, and the magnificent specimens of the sterner sex, those "gentlemen" whom no land but England can produce, and I could not help drawing a favourable contrast between them

and the foreign notabilities I saw scattered amongst them.

In a box not far removed from ours, and on the same tier, sat Charles Compton; it made me quite happy to see him there, one friend in that vast assemblage of faces.

He had been sitting absorbed in the music, he seemed only to breathe and live under the spell it cast around him, and his face was a perfect study with its dilated nostril, its parted lip, and fixed eye, as I saw it in profile.

Our box was crowded with visitors; several elderly gentlemen, whom I wished away, and a number of ultra-dandies looked in, whom I could also have dispensed with; but Lady Ravensden had something amusing to say to each, and one or two she introduced to me. I found that beyond a few very insipid remarks, they had nothing to say, and was internally wishing that I could act like Diogenes, and tell them not to stand between me and the sunshine.

Presently my guardian walked in, and placed himself by me, speaking in an under tone.

"You're looking very well, to-night, Isola,"

he said, "but don't let yourself be dragged about too much by that old woman; she's as strong as a horse, and can stand anything, but you'll soon lose your beauty, if you get jaded and fagged night after night."

"Do you see Mrs. Dashington?" I said, "I think she sees you."

"Don't doubt it: but where is she? *la belle* Dashington—Ah! I see her—graceful pose she's in, just now; look at it—it's quite a study."

"Are you not going to speak to her?"

"Eh?—no, not to-night."

"Very odd," I thought, "such intimate friends as they are."

As we stood in the crush-room on leaving, Charles Compton joined me, and expressed much pleasure at our meeting.

"I heard you were coming to town," he said, "and my aunt and Leila will be delighted to hear of your arrival; they are in Park Lane—won't you introduce me to your friend? I think I've met her at my aunt's."

I did so; and Lady Ravensden received him very graciously.

"To be sure—know you? of course,

couldn't forget a fine young fellow like you, mind you come and see me very soon."

"Who is that man?" said my guardian, when Mr. Compton left us; I told him, and noticed a look of suspicion on his face as his eye rested on me, but Fitz Booby joining him at the moment, he said nothing.

What was it then that riveted my attention in so absorbing a manner?"

What eyes are those which have met mine, and cause the crimson blood to dye my cheek and brow?—no, no, it cannot be—those eyes are far, far, away—I know not where, and it will be long before I see them again—if ever. What a strange fancy of mine, and what will that gentleman think of my odd behaviour! But drawn as in a vortex of attraction, I steal another glance, there is no mistake, it is not fancy, living, or dead, in the spirit or out of the spirit, one only can be the owner of those penetrating orbs. And how did their glance meet mine?—coldly, O! so coldly; it was quite unaccountable; there was recognition, it is true, but so distantly polite, that far from being flattering, it was painful; and my heart sank within me, and I almost

wished myself back again at the great, gloomy Castle.

How had I offended him ? was this a lesson in life ? was I learning the hollowness of friendship ? was this a sample of what I had to expect from the kindness of the world ?

The nodding crest of some jewel-bedecked dowager now came between us, and I saw him no more ; the shout of " Lady Ravensden's carriage stops the way ! " caused a bustle in our neighbourhood ; there was an offering of arms, a parting in the crowd, and somehow or other, I discovered myself, ere I was aware of it, rattling over the stones, and replying to my chaperon's question of " how had I enjoyed myself ? " by saying, " thank you, very much, indeed ; " and with a sigh and a shiver, falling back in the carriage, and feeling very cold and miserable.

Thus ended my first day's pleasure.

* * * *

My pillow was wet with tears that night, thinking of the cold glance from those mysterious eyes ; it haunted me strangely, and sadly ; it was like the breath of the north wind upon my heart, it seemed to chill my

warm, young feelings, and to nip in the bud, a tender slip of hope, which my weakness had planted there.

A ray of gladness, however, struggled in ; he was not "far away," as I had imagined him to be ; he had stood near me, I had seen him, and perplexing as the fact of his being in England at all, seemed, after what I had heard, it was a pleasant knowledge, nevertheless ; and, no doubt, some opportunity would arise for an explanation between us.

Yes, an explanation would make everything plain between us—our old relations would be re-established, and how delightful it would be to have the enjoyment of his society once more ; to listen to his pleasant chat, to be able to accept his attentions, so delicately and thoughtfully paid—even to receive chidings for my faults from his lips, would be a pleasure.

The gaieties which I had in anticipation, were tinted more brightly, *couleur de rose*, in thinking that they would be shared with him, and I had to check my propensity for painting glowing pictures in imagination.

Soon after breakfast, the following morning,

Lord D'Arville made his appearance. Lady Ravensden had not left her room, so I was obliged to receive his lordship alone.

"Well, Isola," he began, "how do you feel this morning? You don't look quite the thing."

I replied that I did not feel completely recovered from the fatigue of the preceding day.

"Then you must keep quiet. After being for some time in the country, you will feel the excitement of town life a little at first. You had better not go showing yourself in the park to-day as you're looking seedy. Where's the old lady?"

"She has not yet left her room."

"Why isn't she up? but old women are always *in* the way when they're not wanted, and never to be found when they are, which, thank goodness, is seldom. I can't wait, so you must say something civil for me. Good morning!"

He shook hands with me, and was going, when he turned quickly round.

"By the bye, Isola," he said, "you did not tell me how you became acquainted with that young man you spoke to last night."

"His aunt," I replied, "is a great friend of Lady Bernard's, and I met him when I was staying at Compton, in the autumn."

"Oh, indeed! Well, I know nothing of him; but I thought I would just caution you on one point."

"There is no necessity for doing so, in this case," I answered hastily, not wishing any misconception of my sisterly feeling towards Mr. Compton to arise in my guardian's mind.

"There may, or may not be; but I won't be personal—I'll only give you a few general hints. First and foremost, you cannot marry without *my consent* during your minority, which will not expire for several years yet, so that you may as well consult me, when you find your heart in a fair way of being affected; and in the next place, I beg to say, that I will not permit you to have a number of 'danglers' in your train. Don't imagine, because you're staying with that old woman, that you can do just as you please; *my eyes are upon you.*"

This was said slowly and solemnly, and was followed by an impressive pause, while a gleam of intense gratification lighted up his cold, snake-like eye.

Shortly afterwards he left me.

I was pondering over his words, in bitterness of spirit, thinking how entirely I was in his power—at his mercy, and tears were again streaming from my eyes, when a servant entered to tell me that his lady would like to see me.

I trusted to the defective sight of age not perceiving the traces of weeping upon my face ; but I made a mistake.

“My dear, what’s the matter?” said Lady Ravensden, kindly. She was sitting up in bed reading, and looking as fresh if she had had a good night’s rest, instead of only half a one.

My heart was full—very full. I sat down on the bed, and with my hand in hers, I told her my trouble, what I had already suffered from the fear of my guardian, and what I still dreaded—and oh ! what a relief it was to do so !

Hitherto, it had been a secret locked in my own bosom ; I had no friend with whom to take counsel on the matter, for with Mrs. Bounce, kind as she was, a sense of propriety kept me from breathing her master’s affairs to her ; the Comptons knew nothing about it

either ; so that relief inexpressible it was, thus to open my heart to my father's friend.

"The wretch !" cried the old lady, when she heard my tale, "I dare say he thought he had done a vastly clever thing—that it could all he managed very nicely and quietly, and I think it would have created a sensation for him to have brought such a young bride up to town ; very nice indeed, Mr. Grumpy Grim ; but you're not clever enough by half."

I could scarcely help laughing at her droll manner, and the way in which she expressed herself, she continued :

"I had a slight suspicion, my dear, that something of the sort was brewing, when I heard of your being kept so close at the Castle. I know him so well ; but, however, he has lost the game, now I am come to look on," and she laughed pleasantly to herself.

"Never mind him," she continued, "don't fret any more about it, enjoy yourself while the opportunity offers, and be upon your guard ; whatever he may say, don't you be led into giving your consent ; your word once given, however inadvertently, you may have a difficulty in getting out of it."

"There is no fear, dear Madam," I cried, "of my ever agreeing to such a dreadful thing as marrying him."

"I don't know," she said, "he may try to intimidate you, or tell some falsehood or other, and a young girl like you is no match for a wily old diplomatist like Lord D'Arville; but we won't talk about him any more," she exclaimed merrily, "you don't come up here in the season to be moped to death with an old woman; there is the flower fête on Wednesday, and the races are next week—but that is not to-day. Oh! the Comptons are coming presently to call upon you, and we can consult with them; there's your presentation to be thought of, an important affair in your life, and a variety of other matters."

Dear old lady! I was come to the right place for amusement then!

In the pause which followed, I sat meditating how I should broach a subject on which I had thought a good deal—"my father!" I longed to hear her ladyship speak of him, but suddenly I felt a delicacy about it, I hardly knew how to begin, but after a little consideration, thought it better to make no preliminaries.

"Your ladyship spoke of my father," I said, "in your letter, I am so anxious for you to tell me something about him."

Lady Ravensden was a little startled at my *brusque* mode of address.

"I shall be happy to tell you anything I know, my dear," she answered, "but it is many, many years since I saw him—long before you were born."

"But then, tell me about him *then*."

She laughed though her eyes looked rather moist. "Some day," she said, "perhaps I may, but not now, it makes me sad, looking back on those old times, though I was a merry creature as ever lived then! and your father was such a handsome boy! Your Grecian features he had, and the same shaped head, but he was fairer in complexion than you are, and a bold, brave lad: we used to say that when we grew up we would be married to each other. The nonsense boys and girls will talk—and when we parted, we exchanged locks of hair, and presents, and promised eternal fidelity, which promise was broken on my side the following year; but here are the Comptons, let us go down to them."

She rose so quickly that I could not detain her, and the name acting like a spell upon me, I flew to the drawing-room, and there they were. Mrs. Compton was looking soft and gentle as usual in her handsome weeds, and Leila seemed more radiantly beautiful than ever.

My heart bounded towards them with a gush of affection, which I fondly hoped was reciprocated, and after a long chat, they asked Lady Ravensden if she would spare me to accompany them during their drive, urging as their excuse for asking me on this the first day with my hostess, "we know you always have so many visits to pay, and a quiet drive will do Isola more good than gossiping." Mrs. Compton said this laughingly.

"A nice excuse for taking her away from me! but I suppose I must spare her; only mind, she's a great charge."

I looked very demure.

"I must not go to the Park," I said, "I'm looking 'seedy.'" A delicious little scream burst from Leila at this information.

"Why, you conceited puss, how long have you taken to studying 'looks?'"

I told them of my guardian's prohibition, and of the reason thereof.

"But we are not going in the Park," said Leila, "we will take a country drive, it will be quite refreshing to see fields and mossy banks (as the poets say) once more, and the pure air will do our 'looks' good, though I must candidly own that another day I shall not take 'looks' as an excuse for not exhibiting you in the Park."

* * * *

The following day saw me rolling along by the water with Lady Ravensden.

The trees had not yet been burnt up by the blazing summer sun, but looked fresh, and the grass verdant still.

A brilliant throng was passing to and fro, and the scene was gay and interesting. We had our carriage drawn up for a few minutes by the water, and were joined there by Charles Compton on horseback, and the picture of impetuosity he looked, reining in his fiery steed.

I was soon carrying on an animated conversation, or rather discussion with him, and felt quite merry under his sunny influence, he would maintain that all the ladies I admired,

were insipid, or wanting in something or other, and as to the men, his short upper lip would curl disdainfully, as I expressed my opinions, and he would give an emphatic "Ah!" which was very provoking, and roused me to further opposition. We were thus bandying opinions, when a gentleman on horseback, whose progress was impeded by the obstacles we presented, was brought face to face with me—those eyes again! Yes! it was Mr. Grey.

He must have seen me, I think before I observed him, judging from his manner, for he expressed no surprise at seeing me, he merely removed his hat, and said coldly,

"How do you do, Miss Brand?" and with a glance at my companions, passed on.

Our conversation was still kept up, but on my side with great difficulty. A weight had fallen upon my spirits, and the effort to maintain a composed and cheerful appearance, cost me much pain.

I longed to scream.

We took several more turns in the drive, but *the* horseman did not appear again, and I saw nothing else; the constant succession of

carriages, with their gay occupants made my eyes, and my head ache, and most welcome to my ear was the order—"Home."

When alone once more, I thought long and sadly upon the strange conduct of my friend, for such he seemed to me, more than any one I had ever met. When we parted, he was all kindness, what could have caused such an alteration in him, now?

Oh! what would I have given for one word with him that morning! it might have chased the cloud away which now shadowed my path; but he had passed coldly on, vouchsafing me only that slight, indifferent salutation.

All our previous intercourse came to mind, with the recollection of his kindness, his gentleness, and his superior intellect, and I thought I had not sufficiently appreciated his society, when I had it to enjoy.

I was lost in wonder as to the cause of his estrangement from me, and the burning thought came, suppose he was only making game of me, making me his plaything for the hour! and he *did* call me "little Missie," in a most impertinent manner: he was amusing himself at my expense, and now, he finds it

convenient to have nothing more to do with me. Or—or—could it be that he knew more of my history than I did myself? that with a friendly interest he had inquired some particulars of my birth and origin, and that all had been revealed to him! That the delicacy of his nature—that very trait which I so admired in him, made him shrink from further contact with an outcast like myself! The agonizing thrill that thought gave me!

This humiliating conclusion did not raise my spirits, and Lady Ravensden having a small card party that evening, I found it an insufferable infliction.

The Comptons were not there, but my guardian was, and several other antiquities; the young men who had been invited, sent excuses, not knowing as her ladyship said, "that they were to meet any but old 'fogies,' but they'll soon be glad enough to come," she added.

So beyond watching the various passions depicted in the countenances of the players, and listening to some bygone young ladies, who followed the example of Jephthah's daughter, and bewailed their single lot, in touching

strains to a piano accompaniment, I had no amusement, but sat apart, feeling very stupid and cross, and the people all thought me ill ; so I was in heart.

I spent the next day with the Comptons, in Park Lane, and had a long chat with Leila about our mutual friends.

"What has become of Mr. Marsden?" I asked.

"O! have you not heard?" she exclaimed, "the strangest thing in the world, he is engaged to be married to—whom do you think?—but you would never guess, I am sure—Caroline Fortescue!"

I was indeed surprised, it was a match I never should have dreamed of, and expressed my astonishment.

"It has surprised everybody," said Leila, "and I cannot say that I think it a nice one. It is a capital match in a worldly sense for Caroline Fortescue, but poor Mr. Marsden! I doubt if he will be happy," and Leila looked graver than usual.

"Forgive me, dear Leila," I said, "but I always fancied—"

"Ah! I know what you would say; but

it was impossible, I could not like him, though I tried hard to do so ; and it would have been cruel and dishonourable in me to deceive him, besides the sacrifice of my own happiness."

"What news of Evelyn?"

"Pretty good, only Captain Hawkes's regiment is quartered at Manchester, and as he will not bring Evelyn to see us, we never get a sight of her ; my darling sister !" and an affectionate glow pervaded Leila's sweet face.

"And Rose?"

"Oh ! I had a letter this morning, she is with her husband in the Holy Land. Reginald has been with some Bedouins into the Desert, and is going shortly for a trip to see the Druses of Mount Lebanon ; he is so madly fond of adventure."

"But what does he do with poor little Rose the while?"

"She is obliged to stay at Jerusalem or Jericho, while he goes on these expeditions ; but I pity her from my heart, for she is complaining sadly, and it is a great shame to drag her about so ; she will be delighted to return to England."

"Dear girl, yes ! none of our friends ever

wished her 'sent to Jericho' I'm sure." I was longing to ask Leila some questions about Mr. Grey, and made several efforts to turn the conversation into a direction from which it would be easy to diverge into that interesting topic, but though it was hovering in my mind the whole time, something always prevented my touching upon it; once I thought I had summoned up sufficient courage to do so, and the words were on my lips, when Leila asked me if I did not think her cousin Charles looking ill.

"Now you mention it," I said, "I do not think he is looking very well."

"No, he is not," said Leila, "he has been working himself to death at Oxford preparing for his examination, he scarcely allowed himself food or rest, and such close application, together with his ardent desire to distinguish himself, made him quite feverish and ill; however, he was rewarded by passing with great credit, and taking his degree; but you should have seen him when he came to us, a day or two afterwards—seen and heard him!"

"What did he do?"

"What did he not do! rather, he was wild!

I never saw any one in such mad spirits, he was like a boy just escaped from school, and it did one good to see him. We had a little dance on the evening of his arrival, and he really conducted himself in the most extraordinary manner; for the reaction was so great, that his hilarity was most boisterous, and being under no restraint when with us, the effect was beyond anything I could have imagined. He danced, and kept the others dancing, till the house seemed coming down, and poor mamma had one of her nervous attacks. He sang too, better than I ever heard him, and long after we had gone to bed, he was out upon 'the leads,' with some of the other 'boys,' and they were riotous even then."

"And Mr. St. Leger," I said, "have you seen him lately?"

"Yes, he called on us the other day, and told us, that for the sake of variety, he intended renouncing the pleasures of the London season for one year; and that being free now from parliamentary cares, he should travel for the improvement of his health and mind, (besides the 'variety,' I suppose)."

"And where is he gone too?"

"Guess."

"Alpine solitude?"

Leila shook her head.

"Classic Italy?"

"No."

"Romantic Spain?—dear, interesting middle-age Germany?"

"No."

"Then it's the East! he has a Beckfordian fancy for 'Halls of Eblis,' or a Byronic feeling for Corsairs, and Gulnares, and pistols and poetry, and pachas and ladies, and so on."

"Nothing of the kind, no fancies so frenetic ever crossed the well-ordered, neatly-arranged mind of Mr. St. Leger."

"Ah! you shall not laugh at him, though, I'll grant you, he is somewhat conventional, and does not commit the wild extravagancies of a certain cousin of somebody's; but it does not follow, that because he has learned to check all enthusiastic demonstrations, and has schooled himself into apparent indifference on matters of sentiment, that he therefore possesses none; much, and deep feeling may be concealed under a nonchalant manner."

Leila looked as if she doubted the possibility of such a thing.

"But whither has he bent his steps dear?" I asked.

"He has gone northwards."

I shivered. "To the Hebrides, that is quite Johnsonian—or Iceland, perhaps?"

"No, he has joined another friend in a visit to Norway: those beautiful 'Fiords' seemed to possess a great charm for him, and I imagine that he thinks he shall get 'freshened up,' in the pure air of those northern lands, and on his return here, will begin life over again on new principles."

Chatting thus, we wiled away the time, in that pleasant little drawing-room, which looked over the Park.

It communicated with a small conservatory, filled with choice flowers, and Leila fitted in and out, like a bird amongst them, singing, ever singing; a blithe, happy being, connecting herself, as it were, with the sunshine, and the flowers, music and joy, and all bright, beauteous things.

The day passed very pleasantly, in spite of a lurking wish in my heart being ungratified—a

question constantly rising, to be sent back, and smothered ; but when I returned home again, it was with vexation, and self-contempt, I found how little I was my own master. Why had I not asked Leila about Mr. Grey ? it was such a simple question, it would have been so easy.

I do not know.

The next morning, I determined to redeem myself in my own estimation, by overcoming my repugnance to learning my own history, and obtaining what information I could from Lady Ravensden.

Accordingly I repaired to her room, fully bent on mastering my feelings, and hearing calmly any particulars her ladyship could give.

As usual, she was in bed, I seated myself by her side and began :

“ You promised me, dear Lady Ravensden, an account of your acquaintance with my father : can you not believe that I am very anxious to hear the recital ? And are you not good-natured enough to satisfy my curiosity ? It is not impertinent I assure you, but simply natural.”

“ Yes, dear,” and the old lady sighed, “ I will tell you all some day.”

“But now, now, why delay any longer?”

“I’m grown foolish, I think, my pet, and when I look back those long, long years, I’ve a pain at my heart which I do not like ; I never could bear trouble, and always shook it off as the bird shakes the rain from its plumage ; still I believe it is well for one to take a retrospective glance occasionally, and as my Isola is so anxious to hear the old woman’s story of her youth, I’ll endeavour to afford her a gratification, and do myself good at the same time. I needn’t tell you that I was not born a countess, but the youngest daughter of a poor commoner—poor but proud, being of an old Scotch family ; and I was brought up—as they say—‘genteelly,’ yet with a knowledge of ‘how to make ends meet.’

“I was a wild young thing—full of frolics and fun, and hard it was for me to submit to the strict rules and regulations of my parental home, and glad, indeed, I was when I received an invitation from an aunt settled in England, which invitation my father thought it prudent to accept for me.

“The old cathedral town in which my aunt lived, was enlivened by having a regiment

quartered there, and the first gaiety in which I had ever participated was a ball given by the officers to the families in the neighbourhood. With what fresh joyous feelings I looked forward to this event! and how great was my delight when I found myself in the gay throng, and the partner of Captain Courtenay, who by general admission was the handsomest man in the regiment. I believe we danced together more than was consistent with strict etiquette, but of this I had no notion; I was excited, happy, and for the first time, in love.

“That evening was truly marked by a white stone, and its memory will never leave my heart, it steals over it even now, like the freshness of morning.

“Captain Courtenay called the next day at my aunt’s, in accordance with the fashion of that time, when such an attention on the part of the gentlemen who had had the honour of being your partners was expected. We saw him frequently after that, and my life became a dream. You have never been in love, Isola, you have yet to experience that sweet madness, so cannot tell what were the sentiments with which I regarded the young, noble, gallant fel-

low, who paid me the first compliments which ever saluted, and chimed pleasantly upon my ear. Another was a frequent visitor also, one whom I had known before as a boy, and who singularly enough, chanced to be in that very regiment then quartered in the old town—that other was your father, Isola ; and he, the young ensign, had the favourable notice of his captain. I am making a long story I'm afraid, but my recollections circle round those days : and I can well remember how indignant poor Marmaduke used to be at the attentions paid me by Courtenay, considering that our childish flirtation gave him a claim to my girlish notice.

“However, this state of things did not last long, for Courtenay very soon proposed in due form, and being as great a favourite with my aunt as with myself, he engaged her to assist him in pressing his suit with my father. The latter, however, had entertained different views for me, for considering me the belle of the family, he counted upon my making an alliance which would be advantageous to my brothers and sisters. He sternly forbade my marrying a man whom he denounced as a gamester and

a pauper, and ordered me to return home immediately, if Captain Courtenay intended remaining in the neighbourhood. I knew he wronged my lover, and when the latter urged the expediency of our being privately married, indignation against my father as much almost as love for Captain Courtenay, inclined me to agree to his proposal.

“We were married; my aunt, good, kind-hearted soul, being the only member of my family cognizant of the fact.

“Shortly afterwards, however, my happiness was clouded by my husband’s regiment being ordered to Spain, the seat of war at that time: and with many and bitter tears we parted.

“Time passed on, anxiously enough for me; month upon month I received orders to return home, which orders my aunt always found an excuse for my not complying with; and my parents at length prudentially accepted her kind offer of keeping me some time longer.

“At length arrived a period, to which I looked forward with dread—I was on the eve of becoming a mother. My aunt was taken suddenly ill, the officious neighbours sent the news to my father, and in the hourly expecta-

tion of seeing his dreaded countenance, and of losing for ever, my beloved aunt, I received the intelligence that my husband had been fatally wounded in a recent engagement.

“The agony of that hour I can never forget, and amidst throes of anguish bodily and mental, I brought my child into the world.

“My child ! my child ! I heard its cry, which thrilled my very soul, but the next moment, the sight of my father regarding me sternly, so affected my frame, that I became insensible. When I recovered consciousness, my aunt was no more, and my child, that little being for whom my heart so craved—where was it ? ‘let me look upon its face,’ I cried ; but they shook their heads—the child too was dead !”

The old lady wept, and her voice sank to a whisper, as she recalled her early sorrows ; she continued.

“I was ill a long time after that, and on my recovery, was so weak as to do readily what I was bid. I returned to my father’s house, and then underwent persecutions and unkindnesses at his hands, and from all my family, which I could ill brook ; and when two years afterwards, Lord Ravensden proposed

for me, I accepted him, as a mode of releasing myself from a position of discomfort.

“Poor fellow! he deserved a richer heart than accompanied my hand at that bridal; but I gave him respect and esteem, and afterwards his noble spirit and generous feeling so won upon me, that I gave him my warmest affection; and when, at length, our little son clung with his tiny arms about my neck, we were a happy pair, though the thrilling joy of my first love, and the cry of my first-born, were not forgotten.

“I became a leader of fashion, and amongst the host of idlers in my train, I numbered Lord D’Arville, and your father; the former followed me as the shark follows the vessel in which there is a corpse—in the hope that rottenness of principle, or pollution of feeling might render me a victim to his voracity: your father’s sentiments were very different, and we were ever true friends.

“He married, and in society we frequently met during several years, till the death of our respective partners, rendering us both again free, he thought fit to renew his suit of younger days.

"But I had had enough of matrimony, and said him 'nay:' he was hurt, offended, and parted from me without a farewell. I next heard that he had accepted an appointment in the West Indies, and save the news of his death, had no further tidings of him."

"But, my mother—my mother—" I cried, "what of her? tell me, I beseech you."

"I cannot, dear, you must know more respecting her, than I do."

What a disappointment! My heart sank, and I could only say feebly,

"The accounts of her, which I have received, are so vague, that I hoped your ladyship could have given me information of a more definite nature."

"No, my love, all I heard was that she was a Mexican lady, a descendant of one of the oldest families which settled there at the time of the Conquest of that country by the Spaniards."

"But—" what was the question I was about to put? it stuck in my throat—it could not rise to my lips, dared I doubt the honour of my mother!

No—no, away with doubts and fears, or

let them lie, eating like a canker into my heart, rather than know myself without the shadow of an uncertainty, to be the child of sin.

I will cling to hope—to a fond belief in the purity of those spirits from which mine emanated, and raise my head with the highest of earth's daughters. Why—why had a mere look or sneer such power to sway my soul!

I was pitifully weak, with all my pride.

CHAPTER II.

"At Court, every one for himself."

PROVERB.

LADY RAVENSDEN was all anxiety about my presentation, thinking far more upon the subject than I did myself.

It had been arranged that she was to present Leila Compton at the same time, and this pleased me greatly.

There was a grand discussion on the important point of dress, in which we were assisted by some "Madame," a milliner of astonishing taste, and more astonishing presumption, to whom Leila listened with deferential gravity, but caricatured capitally afterwards; whilst I decided the matter in peremptory style—desiring the woman to make me a robe of purest

whiteness, and adorn it with Mexican lilies—those truly glorious flowers, which I so love.

“Mais ! if Mademoiselle will permit me to tink.”

“Oh ! you may think as much as you like about the minor details ; but that is to be the general effect.”

“Oui—oui—dee general ‘fect’ superbe—magnifique—dee whiteness éblouissant, and the flowers, gor-gorgeeous, c’est bien, Mademoiselle.”

We went—we endured the push and the scramble, the stifle and the crush of both passage and stairs, and by the time I reached the royal presence, I was so exhausted as scarcely to be able to stand ; and felt “not fit to be seen ;” my dress was in rags—its purity sullied—its carefully disposed ornaments crumpled. My arms were scratched as if I had had an encounter with cats on the way, and to add to my discomfort, the dreadful apprehension took possession of me, that “my back hair was coming down.” However, seeing others in as bad a plight as myself, gave me courage, and considering all things. I bore it philosophically—this was as well, for on leav-

ing the vicinage of royalty, I happened to perceive the eyes of my guardian (who held some office about the court), fixed upon me in a very anxious manner, as if he were curious to see how I should comport myself on the occasion.

As to my companions, Leila attracted greatly by her extreme loveliness which was unimpaired, either by fatigue or exertion; and was infinitely amused at the difficulties we had to encounter; and the old lady was too much accustomed to similar scenes, to think anything of the present; she made her way famously, not hesitating upon doing "acts of violence," which it would have horrified *me* to commit.

I noticed also that Mrs. Dashington (of whom I caught a peep in the distance), though usually so delicate as scarcely to be able to stand—who always carried a smelling bottle with her lest she should faint—and invariably was taken out of church if the sermon were long, or the heat oppressive—was able not only to stand, and to bear the suffocating warmth, but to battle away manfully—laying about her right and left, pushing her way—squeezing and pressing, regardless of anybody.

I became so ill when, the grand performance over, we were making our way out, that I think I should have fallen, had I not suddenly found myself supported by a manly arm. At first, I thought it was my guardian, who had come to the rescue; but what was my surprise—my tremulous joy—yes—joy (it must be confessed) to find that it was the arm of Mr. Grey on which I was leaning.

Some of the old look came back again as our eyes met, and I felt inclined to be quite happy; but it was only for a moment, the next I felt strangely agitated and fearful.

I endeavoured to attract the attention of my friends, but Leila was engaged in a flirtation with a handsome young gentleman, and the dowager was carrying on something similar with two or three old ones.

Meanwhile my companion and I were silent, all that passed at least, was an inquiry on his part if I felt better, to which I remember I gave a nervous, trembling answer.

It was strange, I had so wished to speak to him, if only for a moment, yet now that the opportunity offered, I could not embrace it.

At length my awkward position was bettered

by my flirting friends growing tired of their occupation and turning to me.

"Shall I introduce you to Lady Ravensden?" I ventured to say.

"If you wish it," he answered carelessly. "I shall be very happy to be introduced to her ladyship."

I presented him to my chaperon, who as she afterwards said many times, "took a great fancy to the young man," and as was always the case with her, did not hesitate to show her preference; she asked him to give her his arm to the carriage, and when seated therein, told him she hoped to have the pleasure of seeing him in Hertford Street.

I thought it so kind of her. "Will he come?" was the thought that followed. I had misgivings upon the point.

Some one else came, however, Lord D'Arville.

"Well, Isola," he exclaimed with some cordiality, "I must congratulate you on having made your débüt, and got through it very well considering: much better than I expected; for, to be candid, I had my doubts upon the subject beforehand; but I must say that, for a wonder, you didn't blush or—"

"There was nothing to blush about," I said quietly.

"To blush about? no—but you don't always consider whether there is occasion for it or not; however, you looked very nice to-day, very composed, pale and aristocratic, and I felt rather proud of my ward. You see I give you praise, when it's due; there was only one thing I objected to."

"And what might that be?" I asked.

"Your being presented as 'Miss Brand' instead of 'Lady D'Arville.'"

I shuddered.

"You're still inclined to be a little fool, I see," he said with an air of annoyance; "but it won't do, young lady, it won't do. You think to disgust me with your manifestations of dislike, but you won't succeed, for if anything, I like a woman the better for not being too fond of me; nothing is more painful to my feelings than having a woman 'spooney' upon me, it's positively distressing; but beginning as you do with coldness, you'll warm up to just the right point in time."

I laughed, and I think there must have been derision in my manner, for he looked

angrily at me for a moment, and seemed disposed to answer me sharply, but he checked himself, and said quietly :

“ I see you’re blind to your own interest, and there’s no use in talking to you now ; when you’ve seen a little more of the world, you’ll come round to my way of thinking, and be glad to have a man of my experience, and —and advantages whom you can call your husband ; *ad interim*, I would thank you to treat me properly, that is to say, with the deference and respect due to me as your guardian.”

At this moment Lady Ravensden entered the room.

“ I am very glad to be able to see your ladyship at last,” he said, “ you’ve been one of the invisible ones lately, never to be seen.”

“ Not seen ? why I’ve been about everywhere, your eyes are getting weak I’m afraid. I feel mine so occasionally, but neither you nor I can expect to remain young for ever ; we’re both of us ‘ descending in the vale of years ’ as it is pleasantly expressed, are we not ? and your lordship is not looking quite so well as you were last year.”

Lord D'Arville laughed, though he looked as if he would have liked to strangle the loquacious dame.

"Hem—I feel very well, never felt better, but, however—hem—I wished particularly to see you."

"Indeed—why what's the matter then?" cried Lady Ravensden, "have you quarrelled with Ellen again? or what has happened?"

I was leaving the room, and did not hear his reply, but I saw the darkness gathering over his face. A fresh mystery!

* * * *

Park Lane again; it was so delightful to have the society of Leila once more, that I could not resist Mrs. Compton's pressing invitation of "come to us whenever you can," and I was the more pleased at going, from finding that Leila missed her sister very much, and welcomed me almost as another.

During our conferences, Leila generally took a seat at the piano, and in the pauses of conversation, would favour me with her last new song or waltz; going from grave to gay, with that rapidity of transition which charac-

terized her mind ; or we would sun ourselves in the conservatory, Leila amusing herself the while, in pulling off the blossoms of the plants, by giving them little twists and twirls unconsciously. She was a most destructive girl, by the way, lost or spoiled everything she ever possessed, so that it was quite dangerous to trust her with anything of value—it was sure to come to an untimely end.

Her pathway was tracked by bracelets, brooches, fans, pocket handkerchiefs. She rarely returned from a drive, or walk, without losing some one of these minor articles, and frequently experienced heavier losses in the shape of a costly veil, or superb shawl, which however, she would not have missed, had not her friends remembered the article, and asked her what had become of it.

“Where can it be?” she would exclaim, on such an occasion ; “it must be lost—how deplorable ; it was such a love !” and the “love” was replaced by something lovelier, which shared the same fate in a few days.

One evening, as we sat in the half twilight, watching the last tints of a gorgeous sunset fading away, I thought I would ask her if she

knew how it was that Mr. Grey was in England, when she suddenly turned to the subject herself.

"O, Isola!" she exclaimed, "I forgot to tell you that I met your friend, Mr. Grey, last night, and we had a long chat together."

"I saw him the other day," I said, "and was rather surprised at seeing him, for I understood he was going abroad—going to India."

"So he was, but the business on which he was going, was settled by an agent; but I wonder you did not know he was in England, because there was a full report in the papers of his speeches, on his return for ——, the other day. It is the second time he has been returned for the place."

"It was strange that I did not see it."

"Much stranger, though, what he said to me about you." She laughed so heartily, as she spoke, that a feeling of pain shot through my heart for a moment, and I could almost hear its beatings. It seemed swelling in my bosom, and I felt quite faint as I knelt there on a low cushion at Leila's feet. What

could he have told her about me, which was so very amusing? She continued laughingly,

“I must tell you, Isola, it was so very ridiculous; he has got the strangest idea into his head, he asked me how you—Isola, could ever consent to marrying Lord D’Arville! I was amazed, and laughed immoderately, but it did seem so extremely absurd! and I was quite puzzled to think what could have given him such a notion.”

I saw it all now! and his mysterious conduct was explained; he despised and avoided me, and no wonder, if such was the impression on his mind. I felt alternately hot and cold while thinking on the matter, but fortunately, the deepening twilight concealed the emotion I was suffering from the eyes of my companion. My guardian had evidently spread the report, to prevent my receiving attentions from any other gentleman, and to further his ends gave me the advice he did, “to treat him with the respect due to him as my guardian,” which was nothing more nor less than being never seen out, without having him at my side; and I was to give a colour-

ing to the report he had spread, by appearing to receive his attentions with pleasure.

No wonder you would not allow "danglers," I thought!

How my heart burned within me! how I longed for Mr. Grey to know the truth, to hear of the baseness of my guardian, and to feel assured that I never would agree to his wishes.

But how was he to know this? At first, I thought of telling Leila the state of the case, and trusting to her for enlightening him, but there was something in her manner which deterred me from doing so; she treated it as a capital joke, and went rattling away most facetiously upon the subject.

"I can fancy the scene when he proposed," she said, "the effort to bend his knee, must have caused agony to the stiff joint, and the impetuous manner in which he would rise, with the rapturous consciousness of having won you for his bride, would be calculated to disturb the elaborate arrangement of sundry pads and belts, poor, dear old duck! But joking apart, Isola, what good fun it would be, were he to take a fancy to you! Were I in

your place, I would certainly exert my powers of fascination to the utmost, it would be such a romantic, delicious thing to have one's guardian for a lover, just what one reads of in novels, and in these prosaic times, it would be something refreshing—delightful.”

My own private opinion differed widely from hers, but I only laughed, and told her that I was not such an incorrigible flirt as she was, and that I had no wish to distinguish myself by the number of my conquests.

“So you say ;” she remarked, in a provoking tone, “but I am very curious to hear more about Mr. Grey's visit to D'Arville Castle—to me it looks very suspicious, come now, confess.”

I suddenly discovered that I must hurry home to Lady Ravensden, as I was to accompany her to one of the theatres.

No, Leila was too giddy. I could not trust her with any confessions. Pleasant and affectionate as our intercourse was, there were none of the mutual confidences upon “important nothings” between us, which generally exist between girls calling each other friends.

The reason might have been, that I did not seek her confidence, having a sensitive shrinking from anything which looked in the least like prying curiosity, and I withheld mine from her, fancying that she was giddy and thoughtless.

But I wronged her. The surface was sparkling, reflecting the sunshine which fell on her pathway ; but there were hidden depths—rich founts of feeling lying hidden in her heart, which I little suspected then.

CHAPTER III.

"In the Great World—which being interpreted,
Meaneth the West End of a city,
And about twice two thousand people bred,
By no means to be very wise or witty,
But to sit up while others lie in bed,
And look down on the universe with pity."

BYRON

I WAS now fairly launched in life—that species of life, at least, which is denoted when the expression is used, "such a young lady is come out;" and dinners, balls, operas and fêtes followed each other in such rapid succession, that I had hardly any time for reflection.

My chaperon was never weary. Often when I have felt half dead with fatigue, she has proposed some fresh pleasure, and wondered much if I did not feel inclined for it also.

Certainly, she had drunk from the spring of eternal youth, so far as her spirits were concerned ; and her frame was a truly wonderful one to stand it as she did. I have gone to bed, and hours afterwards have heard her still in the drawing-room below, joking and laughing as she played rubber after rubber ; yet the next morning she would be full of plans for the day's gaieties.

The excitement of this mode of life was amusing, I must own, and served to divert my mind from dwelling so much upon my guardian's detestable conduct as it would otherwise have done.

I was subjected, however, to excessive annoyance by the marked attentions he paid me in society. Do what I would, I could not shake him off ; and the sight of his lamp-post-like figure, and his small stone-grey eye spoilt my pleasure many an evening.

Lady Ravensden was most kind to me ; and when I could (which was seldom), it was pleasant to talk over the difficulties of my position with her ladyship.

She always listened to me attentively, but said little ; and though from her manner, I

drew some hope, yet it was of a vague character. The "Ellen" so mysteriously mentioned, was never alluded to in her conversations with me.

Mr. Grey I rarely met, though I never went to an assembly without hoping that I should do so, and looking round the room somewhat anxiously to see if he were present; but Leila informed me that he went very little into society, attending night after night to his duties in "the House."

"Balls he very seldom honours with his presence," remarked Leila; "and I do not know that his company there would be very desirable, as, though an excellent creature, he does not dance."

"Why do you call him an excellent creature?" I asked, glad of having an opportunity of talking about him.

"Because I have heard Reginald tell so many anecdotes of his kind-heartedness. He will put himself to the greatest inconvenience and trouble to assist any person who is in difficulty; sometimes, in the case of a poor man, who is going to be thrown into prison for debt—if Mr. Grey happens to know anything of him, and thinks that he has got into

trouble more through his misfortune than his fault—he steps forward and saves him from jail. At another time, a poor widow applies to him, who has been left with a family of children—he will take all manner of trouble about the unfortunate people, and get the children provided for in charity schools, and so forth. Then, as you know, he is the advocate of all those measures which are for the amelioration of the condition of the lower classes; and his speeches, I believe, are most beautiful; so that, if he only would dance the *deux temps*, and polka, and be like any other rational being,” said Leila, in conclusion, pulling to pieces a splendid bouquet the while, “why, he would be a perfect angel.”

And it was this kind-hearted, “excellent creature” who had treated me so strangely! He ought to have known me better than to believe the reports which my guardian might have circulated. I felt angry with him, and vexed with myself. Why did I not explain matters when I leant upon his arm fainting after the drawing-room? When should I have another opportunity? I never met him now; and when, in courtesy to Lady Ravens-

den, after her kind invitation, he left his card in Hertford Street, as ill-luck would have it, we were out.

It was so provoking! and it really seemed as if the fates were against our meeting. This apparently only increased my desire of seeing him, and invested him with an interest, he would not otherwise have possessed, at least, I suppose not.

Meanwhile, Lady Ravensden had several little schemes in her busy head about me, and alternately advocated the claims of "Sir So-and-so, or the Honorable That," but she found me very troublesome in not falling in with her views.

However, as she took very good-naturedly the many disappointments my wilfulness caused her, we did not quarrel upon the matter; she only told me, that if I was so extremely particular and difficult to please, I should "go through the wood, and through the wood, and pick up the crooked stick at last."

I will not dwell on the gaieties of this, my first London season; as nothing is more uninteresting to my mind than details of such

matters, unless they bear upon the romance of life, and in this case they did not.

Suffice it that the rural festivities at which I had assisted under the auspices of Lady Bernard, sank into insignificance when compared with the career of gaiety, in which I had now entered ; but after the first week, it had lost its novelty, and with that all interest for me.

It was the same programme over and over again, which may be given thus :

1st. Part. Dress, weigh the merits of each robe you possess, decide according to the occasion, and recollect what you wore last night.

You go through the ceremony of reception, hear the music of the night before, and half-a-dozen gentlemen with whom you have danced at other parties, come up and clamour for your hand (or waist), and half-a-dozen more, whom you have never seen, beg to be introduced that they may have a like honour, there is just a chance, that amongst these fresh faces, one may be a taking one, if so, a slight interest is excited.

You honour these creatures, as you feel inclined, or your chaperon dictates, or etiquette

obliges you, and you forthwith advance and retire in mystic figures, or go whirling round and round with them like fantacini.

2nd Part. Between these exercises refresh with ices, and sip negus, talk nonsense, criticise your neighbours' dresses and looks, and carry on as many flirtations as practicable.

Deign to be escorted to supper by your last victim, where, if you choose a crowded corner, you can enjoy a quiet, uninterrupted *tête-à-tête*, and advance matters very considerably if you're so inclined; but if vanity be your moving principle, and your devotee chance to be a good *parti*, or to possess any other advantages which will make you the envied of your sex—parade your conquest on the stairs—complain of the heat, make him fan you, and perform any little servile offices which you may require, such as holding your spoon, or invading the cloak-room for an “angelic love of a scarf” which you have left there; the more you order him about the better.

Then you resume dancing, *con spirito*, and have a finer opportunity of judging of your partner's character than at any other hour in

the twenty-four ; but you must not forget that he has a similar opportunity of finding out yours, if you give it him by complaining of feeling "so very funny," as many young ladies, new to this wicked world, do.

3rd Part. Your chaperon has been teasing you for half an hour or more, and with a sigh, you say, you suppose you must go—"and break a dozen hearts in doing so," cries an innocent young man, who thinks he has been paying you an immense compliment, and blushes all over at having so committed himself.

And then, you adjourn to the cloak-room, and presently issue forth in clouded charms, and tender adieux follow—you roll away, it's all over—and weary, and perhaps with a headache, you care for nothing but your pillow.

And so it is with other amusements, in a greater or lesser degree, according to the amount of excitement ; the fêtes and promenades pleased me at first, but there was a sameness in them after a little while ; and but for one vague hope I had of seeing Mr. Grey occasionally at some of those places, I should have cared very little about them.

But it was rarely that I saw him, and whenever I did, there was sure to be something which prevented our speaking.

He would be with a party of friends, or I would be so surrounded that he could not approach, if he wished to do so. Ah! *did* he wish to do so?

How chill that thought struck on my mind sometimes—it was only when I watched the *insouciance* of his manners with others, that I felt relieved—"he is as cold to them," suggested itself; true, but he had not always been cold to me. Why—why this change?

When surrounded by a gay circle, each member of which sought him, he had shown a preference for woodland rambles with me; had interested himself in my pleasures, my wishes, my studies even, how had I offended him that he should be so altered towards me now? This report, how could he believe it? it was wronging me—if he was uncertain on the subject, why did he not seek an explanation with me? Silly Isola! why should he trouble himself about you?

Mr. Grey is a man of the world, seeking amusement everywhere, and you are no more

to him than any other young lady, "of course not, but I cannot help thinking about him—there is no harm in that:" so I said to myself, and so myself said unto me.

How well I remember the June fête at Chiswick! how crowded the gardens were, and how the sky threatening rain—frightened the fair ladies every now and then, into the belief that their promenading would be summarily ended; yet, how, beyond a passing shower, there was no demonstration of the elements' spite, and we walked on and on, backwards and forwards, till my eyes were weary with the constant passing and re-passing of the gay crowd, and I asked Lady Ravensden, if we did not come to see flowers, and where they were to be seen.

Her reply was characteristic

"My dear, here are flowers in abundance masculine and feminine, no finer description exists in nature's 'Flora,' give me the human genus before all other; however, we must just take a peep at the tents I suppose; so come, and prepare for a squeeze; ha, my dear colonel! your arm, pray, I'm like a poor Peri at the gate of Paradise, (*vide* Tommy Moore)

and you're a good angel come to take me in, now ain't you?"

The colonel, an elderly flirtation of my friend's, declared himself the happiest of men, at chancing to come at such an opportune moment; and offering his other arm to me, we proceeded to squeeze our way inch by inch into a tent, where we caught a sight of flowers, beautiful as Nature and Art could make them, but a better view of our neighbours' bonnets and backs.

This being the case, my anxiety now was as great to "get out," as it had previously been to enter this paradise; but Lady Ravensden once in, seemed content to remain there, and I began to fear, she would do so.

It was in vain that I gave hints, she chatted away right and left, having discovered several acquaintances jammed in like ourselves, in the immediate neighbourhood.

I, too, had recognized a good many people, and after numerous spirited attempts on his part, to make way through the closely packed mass of people, a Mr. Calvert whom I had met a great many times at parties, contrived to reach me.

He was a remarkably fine looking, handsome young man, whom it was the fashion to admire for his good looks; but those alone would not have had power to make him agreeable to me.

There was an honest, an open truthfulness in his gallant bearing, which was very prepossessing, and a friendliness—a “*liebenswürdigkeit*” in his handsome English face, which made me like him exceedingly in a Platonic fashion. Some, perhaps, would think it a difficult matter for a girl to entertain such sisterly friendships as Miss Isola did, for both this young man, and for Mr. Compton, but she did nevertheless, and also maintains that the thing is quite natural for people with pure minds. Those whose ideas are unfortunately sullied, may doubt the truth of this, but the less they say about it the better—they will only disclose the depths of their own dirty minds, in trying to cast doubts on the purity of their neighbours, and in bespattering others, we often become muddy ourselves.

It was, then, without any feeling other than that of pleasure in having him to talk to, rather than some empty coxcomb, or tiresome

old man, that when, the place of exit from our imprisonment reached, we walked out once more upon the green sward, I permitted him to walk by my side, and Charles Compton joining me shortly afterwards, became my other supporter ; and so, chatting gaily, we proceeded down the centre walk.

“How well Miss Pomfret looks to-day,” exclaimed Mr. Calvert, as we met a celebrated beauty.

“Yes,” said Charles, “but I don’t admire her.”

“Not admire her ! my dear fellow—that’s heterodox—is it possible you can be so blind.”

“I am not blind, I can see the charms which others see in her—namely, regular features, like those of a statue ; but they possess no charm for me, she’s *vulgar*.”

“Compton, for shame ! You’re maligning ‘lovely woman.’”

“Not at all, it’s the truth. I am speaking of course of externals. I know nothing of the lady’s mental characteristics, save as they are expressed in the ‘index to the mind,’ and the little I could glean during a *deux temps* the other night ; she then did not come out in

great force, perhaps because she thought I was not worth the trouble of any exertion."

"Ah! ah!" laughingly interrupted the other, "green-eyed—eh?"

"No, nor green in any respect; I speak coolly and *en philosophe*, reconciled completely to the fate of being snubbed by a beauty, especially as I dispute the extent of her charms. Infuse a little intellect and spirituality into her, cure her of that impudent assumption, and ridiculous conceit which she exhibits in every roll of her eye, and action of her body—in fact, fine her down, and make her more of the 'gentlewoman,' and I will gladly bow at her shrine, but certainly not till then."

"But you forget," I said, "what temptation to vanity and conceit, a beauty like Miss Pomfret has to contend with."

"A woman of any mind, is above all such petty weakness, I think I know one lady far superior to Miss Pomfret in personal endowments, who does not assume any airs and graces in consequence, and has the good taste not even to shew her consciousness of possessing beauty."

As he spoke Mr. Compton looked at me

with a smile, that told me I was to take the compliment to myself.

It was the first I had ever received from his lips, and it came so unexpectedly, that I laughed in some slight confusion ; turning at the moment, whose gaze should I encounter but that of Mr. Grey.

I bowed to him mechanically, and he returned my salutation coldly ; I noticed that he was not alone, he was walking with some ladies, and the one at his side—the one to whom he was talking—what a vision of loveliness she was !

The freshness of Aurora bloomed on her cheek and lip, her eye had the bright cerulean tint of summer skies, and her fair hair, shrined in glory her exquisite face.

They passed on.

“What a lovely creature !” exclaimed Mr. Calvert, “have you any idea who she is, Compton ?”

“No, never saw her before, she has dropped from the clouds apparently, a denizen probably of Olympus, judging by her Hebe-ish appearance ; she certainly is very pretty, but, *lovely* ! what an enthusiast you are for beauty !”

"I am not ashamed to plead 'guilty' to that indictment. I'll confess candidly that it's a monomania with me, and I really must find out where that young rosebud was cultured; we must endeavour to ascertain—it's an important thing to know."

There was a group of persons standing near us, and the attention of these people had been attracted like our own, by the passing beauty, and they were now making her the subject of conversation.

"Who is she?" asked a lady of the party.

"Lady Lucy Doveton, the Premier's youngest daughter," answered a gentleman, "she is very young—still in the nursery—and Grey has a fine opportunity, should he choose to embrace it, a fool if he doesn't."

"They say," said another, "that he is in high favour in that quarter, lucky dog! by the bye, what did you think of his speech last night? masterly, was it not?"

"Splendid—O, there's no doubt of his being a very talented young man."

"I saw his speech in the newspaper," said the lady, "and parts of it, I thought very affecting, where he dwelt upon the sufferings of

the lower classes, and talked of liberty and so forth."

"Yes, he's a rising man, and if he play his cards well, he'll soon occupy an important position. Ah! there they are again, uncommonly fine girl to be sure! and *he's* not bad-looking, though he has superlative beauty at his side."

The sky was clouded over strangely, and the band of the Blues never played so execrably.

"How pale you are looking my dear," said Lady Ravensden, who joined me at this moment.

"I am rather tired."

"Tired! why, what a poor tender plant it is!" cried the old lady, "you can't stand anything, why when I was your age nothing ever fatigued me."

Nothing fatigued her now, so I could well believe in the power of her juvenile years; it struck me too, that she never possessed much sensitiveness of disposition, she was warm-hearted and affectionate, but anxiety, apprehension, those bitter component parts of love, were foreign to her, and the feeling of unac-

countable sadness and heart-sickness, which then came over me, she never could have felt.

Some natures, peculiarly constituted, cannot.

I trembled, as I thought how slight an incident had affected me so deeply, and chid myself for my folly; but I could not bring back the smile to my lip, try how I would.

Presently, I saw my guardian approaching and if anything could have called into play my risible faculties, his appearance would have done so: there was something irresistibly comic in it that day. The painful uprightness of his figure, his studied dress, and *tout ensemble*, suggested the common phrase, "he looked as if he had been just turned out of a band-box;" his head seemed fixed on with such carpenter work, that he could not turn it, it was "nailed" on evidently, and he was fain to keep it in one "pose," and move only his eyes, when any attractive object crossed his path. It was thus squinting round the corner of his nose that he first perceived me.

He did not seem over well pleased at seeing me in such companionship, and joining me unceremoniously, giving at the same time a

slight lift to his hat in honour of Mr. Compton, and a supercilious glance at my other friend, he said in a familiar tone, "why, where have you been hiding? couldn't see you anywhere."

"Indeed!"

"No, take my arm. I couldn't get here till late, but I thought I should be able to have one turn, and then escort you to your carriage. I should think you'd had enough of it by this time, if so, the sooner we leave the better."

"I am quite ready to go, indeed, but Lady Ravensden must be consulted."

For a wonder, her ladyship was willing to depart.

While standing at the entrance, leaning on my guardian's arm, I perceived the Premier's party, of which Mr. Grey appeared to be one.

We stood side by side for a minute or two, but the fair girl on his arm was entertaining him in a pretty musical voice, in school-girl fashion, asking a variety of questions, and compelling him, *nolens volens*, to reply. On my other side, my guardian, in a strain of affected

concern, was expressing his regret at my having to wait so long for the carriage.

“Badly managed, for you to be kept standing here.”

Once only, just as we were seated, my eyes met Mr. Grey's, he lifted his hat, we drove on, and the last I saw of him, was his handing the Lady Lucy into her carriage.

CHAPTER IV.

" * * * * It were all one,
That I should love a bright particular star,
And think to wed it, he is so above me."

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

"I know his eye doth homage elsewhere ;
Or else, what lets it, but he would be here."

COMEDY OF ERRORS.

HAD I discovered the key to his estrangement ? It seemed like it, and it struck me what a fool I had been, in permitting my thoughts to dwell so much upon any one, as they had upon this much sought Mr. Grey.

It was evident that his head was turned with flattery, and that, moreover, he was ambitious ; but why—oh ! why had he ever shown me attention ? and taught me to study his

opinions, till I considered he was authority sufficient in any matter.

Why had he appeared so interested in all that concerned me? Assuming almost the familiarity and authority of a relative in his manner; thus drawing me towards him, with a chain so delicate, that it was invisible.

Imperceptibly to myself, it had encircled me; but it was not of so strong a nature that I could not snap it easily asunder; and to free myself would be a light matter.

A man on whom *variety* had such power, as it plainly had in his case, could have no influence over me; and that contemptible feeling had evidently been the moving principle in his friendship for Lord D'Arville's ward. Or had pity moved him? He saw me in a somewhat painful position; and, perchance, he felt pity for me. Pity!—pshaw! I did not want his pity, nor that of any man; and it was with a sentiment of scorn in my heart that I defied his power to enchain me.

The mystery of my parentage at this moment flashed across my mind, and the throb of pain that came with it only added to my irritation. What if he had heard the horrid truth, which,

like a coward I had hitherto shrunk from seeking out, was that to alter his feeling towards me? Was I not worthy of being loved for myself alone? Was I to be answerable for the sins of my parents? There was cruelty in this retributive justice; and with haughty daring I determined to brave the world, and fling back in its teeth the disdain it might cast upon me.

I was binding a circlet of pearls round my head, as this new feeling woke within me; and the glance my mirror reflected almost frightened myself. For a moment I thought I was very wrong, very wicked, to entertain such contempt as that look expressed, for anyone; and I battled with myself, and thought how vastly superior Mr. Grey was to me, and how natural it was that he should pass me by; but that fair girl's image came between me and gentler feeling; and had she been an angel of darkness instead of light as she appeared, I could not have shrunk more from the form memory presented to my eye. She stood between me and— But, I said to myself:

“Oh! this will not do,” and again the combat commenced; and then I tried to

crush the demon of jealousy that was rampant within, and partly I succeeded ; but not on right principles, no, they had no guiding influence then. My spirit was embarked on a stormy sea, without helm or compass ; and it drifted whither it would.

To my aid, I summoned another demon—pride—which trampled on the other, and set its iron heel firmly on my heart ; and then, gradually, the ruffled features settled down into an expression of calm indifference.

In this negative mood, with pale, impassive face, I accompanied Lady Ravensden to the Opera that night.

The performance was Verdi's "Nabucco ;" and the heavy, gloomy grandeur of the piece, with its fine choruses, seemed in harmony with my dark spirit.

I sat listening in grave tranquillity, partly coucealed behind the curtain, and cared neither to see, nor to be seen.

Presently, I perceived my dowager friend's face wreathed in smiles ; and its look was evidently indicating to some one, that he would be welcome in her box.

In a few minutes, the door was opened, and in walked Mr. Grey.

"This is a treat you don't deserve," said Lady Ravensden. "It's a shame of you not to have called upon me; but I'm of a tender, forgiving disposition, you see, and am willing to receive you like a prodigal son." She shook him warmly by the hand as she spoke; and when she released him, he advanced with a bow to me.

I gave him my hand, and, in courtesy, glanced at him as I did so. He seemed endeavouring to pierce the imperturbability in which I had veiled myself; but, directing my attention again to the stage, I paid no more heed to his looks.

"You were unfortunately out, Lady Ravensden, when I did myself the pleasure of calling," was Mr. Grey's reply.

"But I suppose you could have found your way to Hertford Street again, if you had felt inclined? No, no, you're a very naughty boy, and must throw yourself entirely on my mercy."

Mr. Grey smiled.

"Promise to treat me leniently if I do so, and I will. But I do not think there is any necessity for taking such an extreme step. Your ladyship must hear my excuses first.

You must know that my time is so much taken up with business affairs, that I have very little left for visiting—”

“ Even a prime minister, eh ?”

I could not resist raising my eyes to his face at that moment, to see how the abrupt remark of the old lady affected him. He glanced hastily at me, and for the first time since I had been acquainted with him, the colour mounted to his face ; and with some slight confusion, he said :

“ No, no, nothing of the kind, Lady Ravensden. Don't be revenged on me for my seeming—for my remissness, by any libel of that sort.”

“ What a happy man you must have felt this morning, with that houri on your arm,” continued the old lady, unheeding his confusion. “ It was a proud moment for you when you stood with her at the gate.”

“ O, I don't know,” he said, apparently annoyed rather at this badinage ; “ do you think her then so pretty ? she is a fresh little thing, and promises well, but there's not mind

enough for me, she's not the style I admire."

Which was the style he admired? woman, weak woman! how willingly you will swallow a honeyed compliment! these trifling words wrought like a spell upon my troubled spirit.

But it was not the words alone, a look had done more; confusion on his face, the calm, cool, self-possessed Mr. Grey! I almost doubted my own identity in having the power of calling forth such an unwonted exhibition of feeling on the part of a man of his superior tone of mind.

Hitherto, there had been something about him, which seemed to raise him so much above others whom I had met, that to my fancy, he was a being isolated from his fellows, and that the laws which governed common men, touched not him; but now he was brought within the range of sympathy, —of my sympathy, and an electric chain seemed to unite his spirit and mine.

At that moment, the doom which befel the proud and haughty monarch of old, was being enacted, and as I saw the live thunderbolt

split his palaces, and the lurid lightning scathe the house of his glory, the thought of my own pride came to my mind, and I felt humbled.

Lady Ravensden went chatting on to Mr. Grey, who was at her side, but I took no part in the conversation.

A wild hope was fluttering at my heart, taking no definite form, but agitating me strangely ; and I could not venture to speak, to hazard even a simple remark, I so feared lest I should betray my emotion ; so I sat in silence. Could it have been construed as moody, or cold, or indifferent ?

Perhaps so ; beneath the ice of conventionalism who can tell, whether the waters there concealed are chilly as the upper air, lying half congealed in sullen silence, or whether, warm in their sheltered recesses, they are ready to flow onwards like the beneficent gulf-stream, and to pour their riches of kindness and of love amongst the frozen regions of "the world."

It is difficult to tell ; many a spirit, starting buoyant, and full of joy as a mountain rills, finds itself checked in its worldly course, its

sparkling lightness and joyous gush changed to a heavy, monotonous flow, listless, apathetic.

The world goes on before it, it follows slowly with its tide; but not on the crest of the wave, not amongst the rejoicing ones, revelling in warmth and the sunshine of the world's favour; but in lower depths, pursuing a darker and more mysterious way.

Yet, an under current may set in, and with its opposing force, may bring into action, thoughts and feelings lying almost stagnant; and again the surface may be reached, and merrily the wave may dance in the light of the summer sun.

Was all this passing through my mind, as I sat behind the amber curtain in box No. —, of Her Majesty's Theatre?

Something very like it, I fancy; I was trying to smother my feelings, considering how necessary it would be for me to do so in my journey through life, and wondering whether they would have to flow on ever in hidden depths, or whether the kindly sun would smile on them, and guide them on to happiness.

Suddenly the curtain rose on a fairy-like ballet scene.

Aëriel beings seemed floating in a silvery mist, now meeting, now parting, with such grace, such magical grace in the movements of their lithe forms, that they made the poetry of motion to be felt as well as seen. You yielded, as in a dream, to the pleasure of watching those fanciful and artistic combinations of agility and elegance, as shown in the ever changing figures of the dance, to the exquisite effect of the graceful *tableau*, and the wonderful *pas seul*, with its breathing sense of *volupté* and fascination.

I watched it all as dreaming, more dazzled, perhaps, than charmed, till my eye, happening to fall on the lower row of boxes, I suddenly took a dislike to the whole performance.

In the Omnibus box were several gentlemen, and amongst them, my guardian, whose attention seemed more absorbed by the dancers than I had ever seen it by anything but his own charming person ! he was bending eagerly forward—I could not have thought his face, usually so set and formal, could have expressed so much unrestrained gratification

as it did then ; there was a flush on his cheek, and his eye glistened with a strange fire.

I turned with loathing from him, and from the scene. "To the pure all things are pure," I thought; "but your imagination is sullied, my lord, and your ward likes not to dwell any longer either upon you or the scene, which in exciting, reveals you in a true light."

Mr. Grey was gazing on me with something of that anxious, speculative look, I had noticed in him on the last evening of his *sejour* at D'Arville Castle.

"Most of the people are leaving, I think, Lady Ravensden," he remarked, turning to her, "whenever you like to go, I am at your command, and will see you to your carriage, if I may be permitted."

"O, there's no hurry," said the old lady; "let the others scamper off if they like."

"I thought Miss Brand looked tired."

"Are you tired, my dear? O! that's another thing; then we'll go at once, after all, I don't see much use in staying to see this kicking about, girls sticking their feet where their faces should be. D'Arville seems to be enjoying it vastly, however; but it does not

appear to be so much to your taste Mr. Grey.

"Thank Heaven—no." I heard him say, while a look of profound disgust stole over his face; he said no more, but prepared, in some haste, for our quitting the box.

In the crush room, Lady Ravensden soon found a host of friends, and while she occupied herself in talking to them, Mr. Grey led me to a seat.

After an awkward pause of a few minutes, he remarked in a careless tone.

"The gay life you are now leading, must form a striking contrast to your quietude at D'Arville Castle."

"Yes," I answered, "it is very different."

"And which do you prefer?" he asked.

"A comparison can hardly be instituted between them," was my answer; "the brilliant scenes of London gaiety are vastly amusing, and I like them all extremely; but D'Arville has its attractions also."

"Indeed," said Mr. Grey, turning to me with some surprise, "and pray Miss Brand what may they be? I thought that, except in autumn, it offered nothing in the shape of

society, save an occasional dinner to the parson, the doctor and the lawyer—a school tea-drinking party, or a heavy pic-nic.”

“O, it’s not the society,” I said, “that I was alluding to—it is the place itself which is so lovely—it is full of romantic beauty—castle, woods, village, and neighbourhood, and you must remember the little church? who could forget anything so very, very beautiful!”

I spoke enthusiastically, for I was thinking of our rambles there, us two together—and how changed everything was now, and my heart flew back to that happy time, with a fond, yearning recollection.

No answering feeling, however, seemed awakened in the breast of my companion; he merely said :

“You think so?”

“Do not you?” I asked.

“Yes,” he replied, in a somewhat hesitating manner, “it is a fine place, very; but, I should be very sorry to make any very great sacrifice to possess it; there are other things more desirable of possession in this world than a stately residence.”

“O, of course; but—” I did not know

how to proceed, and knowing that he was waiting in silent attention for my response, confused me; before I could reply, he had risen, and was addressing Lady Lucy Doveton—the bright Aurora, who had so flashed upon me in my morning dreams.

“You’re a very naughty man,” she cried, “mamma says you are, for not coming to arrange about the books you promised to lend us.”

I did not hear his answer, Lady Ravensden coming up at the moment.

How light and shadow had alternately flitted across my heart that day! When my head pressed my pillow that night, it seemed days, weeks, instead of hours, since I had last rested there.

“Think’st thou existence doth depend on time?
It doth; but actions are our epochs.”

CHAPTER V.

Julia. They do not love, that do not show their love.

Lucetta. O! they love least, that let men know their love.

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

OF all the amusements in vogue, whereby men in these modern days contrive to cheat old Time of the heavy tax he imposes upon the idle and the stupid, an out-door fête seems one of the most rational, because the most natural of recreations.

Many who would shun the illuminated ball-room, and fly in horror from the pestilential odours of a gas-lighted theatre, find pleasure in an entertainment given beneath the unclouded canopy of heaven; fancying that the frivolity they condemn in one place, is no or such in another.

There seems something poetical in tripping to a lively measure, on the greensward—it has a classical halo round it, which the finest assembly rooms, or handsomest drawing-rooms have not. A banquet, too, spread in the shadow of a fine old tree, is almost patriarchal,—the simplicity of the thing is touching, and reminds one of the *déjeuners à la fourchette* of revered antiquity ; the strictest young dandy of the church, yields under such circumstances to the fascinations of champagne, bright eyes, and a good band ; even though he had preached on the previous Sunday and meant to do the same on the next, against all worldly vanities.

A beverage from which our lips would shrink, if offered in a common mug, acquires a more tempting odour far, if presented in sparkling crystal, or in a cool silver chalice ; and thus it is with pleasure—the draught is the same ; but its acceptance, or rejection by some, depends upon the form, whether simple or otherwise, in which it presents itself.

The climate of our cloud-loving isle, being rarely favourable for dancers on the dewy lawn, and breakfasts 'neath the linden

deprives us of much of the pleasures experienced by the children of sunnier climes ; so that it was with feelings of satisfaction, I saw the sun shining gloriously, and everything giving promise of a fine day, when a fête to be given at Fulham was in anticipation.

We went—the grounds of our host were very beautiful, picturesque, and extensive, and sloped down in a soft, velvet lawn to the river, which swept majestically by.

Groves of trees threw their umbrageous arms over winding "lovers' walks," flowers bloomed around as in a second Eden, temples and alcoves were scattered about on every spot whence a view could be obtained ; and in and around them hovered airy groups chatting, laughing, and idling away the hour, as people in the gay world do.

Here was stationed a band of musicians, in another spot a solitary minstrel sang to his guitar, while half concealed by the thick arbutus bushes in a sheltered dell, nestled a group of gipsies—fortune telling.

The day was one of those magnificent unclouded sky days, which are so rare in England, when the cerulean blue arch of

heaven is unflecked by a single shadow—days when the atmosphere seems filled with sunbeams, and you imbibe heat and love like butterflies, and feel as joyous and unthinking.

How well I remember the events of that day! Our drive down in the delicious warmth of early July—our reception by our hostess, an elegant looking and handsome woman, who with her look of elegance, united the genial one of warm hospitality, and then how we dispersed about the grounds—wandering in parties, or oftener in couples—and how people remarked “that in such a sweet spot, with such splendid weather, so many pretty girls, and such excellent arrangements, nothing could be more delightful.”

My guardian not being there, to darken the scene with his presence, caused me to see everything under brighter hues, and when Charles Compton, who was there with his aunt and cousin, asked me for a waltz, I remember how elastic I felt—and how we flew skimming round us two, like insects in a sunbeam, and how I said in my enthusiasm;

“Is it not delightful? no—no, I’m not in the least tired, I could dance on for ever.”

And then my limbs suddenly failed me, and hanging heavily on my partner's arm, I could dance no more, and he cried,

" Ah! you have overrated your strength."

But it was not that ; as I spun round in the giddy dance, I had become conscious of the presence there of a visitor I had not expected—at every turn I saw his eye fixed upon me, and with an expression of pain that cut me to the soul.

" I will rest here," I said, to Charles Compton, as we came to a little rustic seat placed under the shade of a graceful acacia ; " but don't you stay with me, I know what misery you suffer in listening to this lively measure, unless you can trip to it."

" You don't imagine, Miss Brand, that I'm fond of dancing?" cried he, his blue eyes full of merriment ; he would have said he was not, for contradiction's sake, could he have dared perpetrate such a fib. At this moment Leila joined us.

" Come," I said, " you, Leila, must finish what I began," and after a little persuasion they went, and I remained alone with my fluttering heart, regretting deeply my having

yielded as I had to the soft spell of music, and fearing that I had lost for ever the esteem of Mr. Grey; and then a dark thought came "why should I value his esteem? he was nothing to me—and if he chose to be sulky with me about nothing at all, why should I care? you are still very ignorant and silly, Isola." And thinking thus, I sat musing and watched the white blossoms of the acacia falling like snow flakes upon the emerald turf, whilst my thoughts wandered away in most desultory fashion, now on earth, and now in heaven—from things sublunary to things celestial, and back again; yes, back again certainly, when I heard a tread upon the gravel path, and looking up, perceived Mr. Grey at a little distance.

My heart made a bound, and then he came nearer, came upon the turf; and standing by a bower (literally) of roses, he stood watching the scene. And now I could hardly breathe—would he turn and see me? If he did—I thought I should faint—if he did not—

He moved away in a contrary direction.

* * * *

"It is better so, perhaps—what is the matter with me? Am I really so very silly—so mad. Is this life? these feelings—these—"

But he has turned again—turned—and now he has seen me, and is advancing—and now we are face to face.

I thought a slight pallor came over him for a moment; but with his usual self-possession, he came forward and bowed.

"These are beautiful grounds," he observed, "admirably calculated for an affair of this kind."

"Yes—very lovely."

"And the people seem to be enjoying themselves."

"Very much, indeed, I should think."

"Miss Brand might speak from experience, I imagine, instead of putting the matter in a speculative form."

I do not know what I said in reply, some commonplace remark or other I suppose, but I felt very white and ill.

"You have been dancing yourself half dead," was his next observation, but he said it in a kind tone; and presently, though feeling as in a dream, I was conscious of his being

seated at my side, and the rich tones of his melodious voice were falling on my ear like music.

I almost fancied myself in the woods of D'Arville once more, and looked at him to assure myself I was not dreaming; he was gazing on me intently, and my eyes fell beneath his gaze—what was there in his look that always so thrilled me!

"I wonder," he began in a cold tone, "that under the circumstances in which I believe you stand, you are permitted to dance these polkas and waltzes."

"Who should forbid me? what circumstances?" I faltered.

"Really, Miss Brand, it seems hardly necessary that I should inform you; a fact so nearly concerning yourself, which is known to everyone, you cannot but know perfectly well."

"Will you be good enough to explain yourself, Mr. Grey?"

He looked at me for a moment with a puzzled air, and then said frankly:

"I will."

In me, every sense seemed absorbed in that

of hearing as I listened; but for a few moments he did not speak, at length he said :

“I of course allude to the report in general circulation, of your engagement to your guardian.” I started, and he looked at me searchingly.

There was a choking sensation in my throat, a feeling like strangulation which prevented my giving utterance to a single word.

“It is not for me,” he continued, “to make any remark upon the subject. I feel that it is impertinence in me to do so—or rather it might be considered such,” he added quickly, “but—will you forgive me what I am going to say? will you?”

My lips moved in assent.

“Well then,” he said, “this report is so strange, that till I have it confirmed by your own lips, I cannot believe it—is it true, or are you free?”

He waited patiently a few moments for my answer, which I at length gave in an excited manner.

“I cannot call myself ‘free’ whilst in the power of that cruel man; but the report is false; I do not consider myself engaged to

him, and as long as life and reason remain to me, I will never consent to become his wife."

"What!" he exclaimed, "it is not of your own seeking?"

"What do you mean?" I asked.

His answer given slowly and distinctly, I shall ever remember.

"I was given to understand that you were ambitious, and desirous of becoming—Lady D'Arville; more than this, that your infatuation for—for your guardian was so extraordinary, that you had refused several good offers for no other reason; even when his lordship himself pleaded the cause of your suitors; but to me this is the more inconceivable and mysterious, seeing your open, undisguised preference for another, and a younger man."

Good Heavens! what did he mean? I had listened with suspended breath, but now—life seemed to have left me; I could only gaze at my companion with a fixed, unmeaning stare. Was it thus—thus, that he would allude to my preference for himself! Monstrous! but all my womanly dignity came to my relief at last, rather would I have died on that spot,

than have avowed a single feeling which would have exposed me to his scorn or pity; and mastering myself by a great effort, I said slowly and calmly, as he himself had spoken.

"To whom do you allude, Mr. Grey?"

"Forgive me if I have offended you," he said, seeing the icy coldness of my manner. "I spoke to you for your good."

"I am extremely obliged to you I am sure."

"Iso— Miss Brand, I cannot bear this— did I not feel more than—but what am I saying," and he paused for a moment, as he passed his hand over his eyes; "pardon me, if as a friend—a true and sincere friend, I tell you, that you are exposing yourself to very strange remarks by—by flirting as you do with Mr. Compton."

And this was all! what a load off my mind! the hearty, downright hearty laugh I could not repress, must have convinced him, if anything would, how completely he had been mistaken.

"Is it possible," I cried, "is it really possible, that an innocent friendship like that, could be so misinterpreted! I do not mind

telling you," I added, "that I am very fond of Charles Compton, and feel quite like a sister to him, but indeed he is the very last man I should ever think of in any other way."

"You surprise me," exclaimed my friend; "but certainly of all things in nature, you ladies are the most difficult to make out; philosophical deductions made on the genuine Baconian system, go for nothing when brought to bear upon such inexplicable creatures as women; they are amenable to none of the laws which govern the rest of the animal economy, and were only created to perplex and torment men I do believe." He said this laughingly; and his lively manner communicated a tone to mine.

I felt strangely relieved, my heart grew quite light and feathery again, the air seemed sweeter, the sunbeams brighter, the music flowed in softer harmony, the ladies looked prettier, their dresses gayer, and the buzz, and mirth, and laughter seemed more in tune with my spirit.

"Would you like to join that party who

are going on the water?" asked Mr. Grey, "are you fond of boating?"

"It would be delightful," I said; and offering his arm, he conducted me to the steps where several boats lay moored, and a number of persons were congregated about to embark.

CHAPTER VI.

"Be thou chaste as ice, as pure as snow, thou shalt not escape calumny."

HAMLET.

"WILL you join us, Grey? *do*," cried a merry looking young man, of somewhat boisterous manners, "help Miss Brand in, take an oar, and make yourself useful as well as ornamental."

We were soon seated, two young ladies and myself—a married sister of one of the girls who joined us for the sake of affording us *chaperonage*. Mr. Grey, the boisterous young man (who amongst his companions rejoiced in the name of "Honest Hal"), a little boy, the son of our hostess, who had begged so hard to accompany us that we indulged him—and myself, this was our party.

The sun shone down upon the full broad waters, till they gleamed with silvery light; and we were soon afloat upon their smooth bosom, scudding on before the tide.

We swept past sunny banks where roses were scattered, and the soft turf kissed the wave; past quiet, unruffled spots, where the yellow flag flaunted in the breeze, and the pure water lilies lay couching their lovely heads on their green pillow.

Under the overhanging trees, into shadowy recesses, cool and dim; and steering clear of the branches and roots that made our pathway dangerous, we would emerge again into the sunshine—and hasten on past rustic summer-houses, and classic temples, and fields waving with corn yet green.

Now and then there was the flash of a white sail passing, or a heavy barge slowly trailed along its laboured way—and sometimes a fairy like canoe thing with its one occupant flitted past, or at a bend of the river, a party gay as ourselves would surprise us, or we came in sight of a village, or an old mansion—thus varied was the scene.

And the heat was glowing, delicious, true

summer heat—sending a thrill through every vein—quickenning every sense of enjoyment, making existence double; glorious warmth! kindler of divinest fancies! it visited our foggy isle that day. It was the day for a poet, one who

“.... would watch from dawn to gloom
The lake-reflected sun illumine,—
The yellow bees in the ivy bloom,—
Nor list nor see what things they be.”*

There was a hum of myriad insects in the undulating air, while “plash, plash,” went the oars in the water, and “drip, drip,” answered the pearly drops as they returned to their parent stream.

In my soul there was a stillness of joy inexpressibly sweet—was it the scene alone? I thought so then, and in a hush of feeling, my spirit lay there becalmed—its sails furled—the essence of repose.

Meanwhile the girls chattered away, as girls will chatter, and “Honest Hal” (calling him by his *sobriquet* comes naturally, but I ought to call him Captain Howard), rattled on with tales of his adventures in various lands, telling

* Shelley.

them in an off-hand dashing manner, which sent the young ladies into a sort of hysterical flutter.

Mrs. Blomfield, the young matron, was a tall, slight, graceful looking woman, with a face which at a passing glance you would have called pretty; but the features, petty and insignificant, disappointed you on a closer inspection.

She had a lisp, and a mincing affected manner, which I think she imagined, evidenced good breeding; but which I thought was proof positive of the reverse. She pretended great terror on the water, and by her expressions of nervousness detracted greatly from the pleasure of the rest of the party.

"Do return, Mr. Grey," she said, when we reached a certain point. "You're taking uth to the end of the world I think—I really cannot go any further."

This was said with a positiveness of manner, which in spite of the quiet subdued tone of voice, was strikingly disagreeable, and considering the selfishness of the proposition, and her disregard of the wishes of others, it savoured strongly of ill-breeding.

"Nonsense, Mrs. Blomfield," said Captain Howard, evidencing his right to his *sobriquet*. "You're not afraid surely, when the water's smooth as a mill-stream—boat water-tight, and your watermen such safe fellows as Grey and I. You will allow us to proceed?" and he looked at her with an air of cool, but not ungentlemanlike assurance.

"No! you mutht return."

"Come Hal," said Mr. Grey, "we must obey orders," and with a laugh which had some sarcasm in it, he turned the boat, and began pulling against the tide. It was now hard work for the two gentlemen, and their exertions prevented them talking much; but this was done for them by the two young ladies, and the *nonsense* they talked would be scarcely credited, if recorded here. They actually overwhelmed Captain Howard and Mr. Grey with questions upon the most trivial matters; one of them asked the former which colour he liked best to see her in, blue or pink, and he "posed" the young lady by telling her he "really never knew which she had on, she looking so charming in either; colour," he said, "faded in the brilliant light

of her beauty—and that her garments were merely a cloud wherein to veil her dazzling loveliness.” At which she said,

“Now, you don’t mean that, Captain Howard !”

He assured her it was a fact, and she believed him.

“Have you any idea of the time, Hal?” exclaimed Mr. Grey suddenly, after looking at his watch. “We must make haste—the *déjeuner* will be half over, and though it’s a very unromantic material affair to think of—yet I suppose we must give it some consideration ; but, for your timely hint, Mrs. Blomfield, we might have lost it altogether.”

“And did you really think of the breakfast, Mrs. Blomfield?” cried Honest Hal, “’pon my life, I thought you fed on rose-leaves and drank dew-drops, but an affair of *Périgord* pies, lobster salad, *pâtés de foie gras*, &c., how could you think about it? Fie ! you’ve dashed my boyish dreams of woman’s ideality down—down ! Halloa ! there’s Compton ; my dear fellow, how are you? Why you’re in the same predicament as ourselves, straining every nerve for—a *déjeuner* ! And we all—no !

—Grey and I feel like wolves at evening tide.”

“A race for it,” said Charles Compton, “see who’ll be in first!” and the rowers redoubled their efforts, and on we went.

At first the vigorous pulls of Captain Howard seemed to ensure us the victory, as Charles Compton allowed him to shoot on ahead, but presently the latter came up with us, and I could not but notice him as he came alongside, his finely rounded throat open, with a bright blue neckerchief hanging loosely round; his shining fair hair lifted by the breeze, and the look of eagerness and settled determination, expressed in his face; he was the model for a young athlete, with his strong sinewy limbs, and beautiful proportions.

Leila I saw, was in his boat, and she entered fully into the spirit of the aquatic contest, and would have feathered an oar herself I am sure, had there been one to spare.

In point of weight, the boats were well matched, and so were the opponents, Mr. Compton against Captain Howard, and Mr. Grey, with his quiet but even and vigorous strokes, opposing a strong-looking middle-aged gentleman.

For a time we kept side by side, and neither party seemed to possess any advantage,

I enjoyed the excitement of the race very much, only I was sorry to see the great exertion Mr. Grey was undergoing, though there was no reason for my pitying him more than Captain Howard, but I did.

The girls enjoyed themselves as much as possible, and Mrs. Blomfield finding it was useless to offer opposition, sat sulkily biting her lips. At length the goal was in sight, the steps where we were to land, and now came "the tug of war;" now each rower's muscles were more tightly strung, and we seemed to bound over the water; and now the steps are within a few strokes of the oar, and several groups of people stand there to see the issue of the contest, and to assist us to land.

What possessed her in that moment I know not, a panic I suppose, but in an instant, whilst we were all watching with intense interest the few remaining strokes, Mrs. Blomfield started up.

"For God's sake, sit down, madam—sit down!" roared Captain Howard, who was close to her; but it was too late, in a second

movement, she had tilted the boat so much on one side, that ere I was aware of it, I lost my balance, and was plunged into the water.

I remember hearing Leila's piercing shriek, and the murmured exclamations from the shore, as I felt the cold waves enwrapping me; and then I sank lower and lower, while the green waters boomed over my head, and tangling weeds curled snake-like round my feet: but I tore myself from them with a strength greater than I imagined I possessed, and in another moment I rose to the surface gasping for breath.

In that instant, I discovered that it was not through my own efforts I had risen again to the light and sunshine; another was in the water with me, clasping me in his iron grasp, and face to face, I saw my deliverer—it was Lionel Grey. The others caught me in their arms, and drew me into the boat again, but before Mr. Grey could re-enter it, the keel of the other boat coming in contact with his head, gave him a violent blow, and he fell back senseless into the river.

I saw it all as in a horrible dream: I felt!

Oh ! mercy ! the fell agony of that moment ! and of others that followed.

“Save him !” I screamed ; “save him !” And I battled with those who held me, to let me plunge in, but Charles Compton had dashed beneath the waves, and a moment followed, of suspense so awful, that it seemed an eternity of suffering.

Captain Howard, as I afterwards heard, fearing another accident, pulled hastily in shore and lifting me as he would a child, placed me in safety on the steps ; and then I saw Charles Compton rise with something in his arms—dark hair—I saw it. I knew those black crisp curls, and screamed this time with joy ; but while I looked I observed a faintness steal over Charles’s face, and the next moment he relaxed his grasp, and that head—oh ! Heaven ! sank once more !

Nothing could restrain me now, I sprang into the water, it was not deep at that spot ; I waded on through slimy mud, and over rough stones, and against posts which cut and scratched my limbs ; with one point in view, and that attained, I seized something—I pulled it—I dragged it wildly in an agony of hope

and fear. My strength seemed superhuman, how I did it I do not know, but I brought it on shore—it—what ?

I laughed like a maniac at achieving my task, and then fell senseless by the side of the bleeding form I had dragged to land.

Dabbled with blood, smeared with slime, pale, insensible: was he dead ? Oh ! Lionel—Lionel !

* * * *

A dim recollection follows of being carried along, undressed, put into bed, and tossing myself about the whole night through. Of feeling an everlasting drumming in my ears, and an aching pain and stiffness in my limbs, and experiencing a difficulty in making out where I was, and why I came there. Several persons seemed to be watching and tending me, and frequently moistening my lips, but I never asked who they were, and when I did speak, I talked great nonsense. At length day dawned, and with it, consciousness returned, and I found that my attentive nurses were Lady Ravensden and Leila, and that I was still at Fulham, being too ill after my accident to return to town.

As they told me this, the whole of the dreadful affair flashed across my mind—but one memory assumed an agonising form in connection with it, and stood out in painful distinctness amidst the other recollections, it was the form of Mr. Grey, as I had last seen it! cold—gory—death-like!

“Is he really dead?” I groaned.

Leila, with a little hysterical sob, answered,

“No—no, darling, nobody is dead, lie still, and when you are better, you shall hear all about it.”

“Where is he?” I asked; I almost doubted her words.

“Ah! I see you will not rest till I tell you; well, then dear, when he was restored to animation, and had recovered from the stunning effect of the fearful blow he received, and had heard that you were quite safe, for that was his first question, Isola, he expressed a great wish to return immediately to town; we all opposed that very much, but nothing could persuade him—he would go, and Captain Howard accompanied him home, and promised to write to inform us how he was to-day.”

I breathed an inward thanksgiving for his preservation, and then the thought of another, that gallant youth who had plunged in, risking his own life, came to mind, and I chid myself for my selfishness, in not thinking of him before.

"And Mr. Compton?" I exclaimed suddenly.

"Oh, Charlie? a waterman fished him out directly."

"But he was so warm, that I should fear the sudden chill would effect him dangerously, how is he?"

Leila had gone from my bedside, and Lady Ravensden answered.

"We put him into a warm bath, drenched him with brandy and water, tucked him up in blankets—and now he'll do very well."

"Are you sure?" Lady Ravensden.

"Of course—what's a ducking to a strong young fellow like that! don't you trouble yourself about anything or anybody, but keep quiet, and get well-as fast as you can—I dare say your guardian will be here presently, and you need not see him if you do not like; and I have also sent for your maid."

This latter person made her appearance in the course of the morning.

I was lying in a half doze, when a faint tap at the door roused me, and I said "come in."

In rushed poor Grace, who began crying and sobbing, and uttering a torrent of words.

"Lauk—my deary—dear Missie! why what ever you been, and gone, and done? Bin most drowned. Oh my! Oh my!"

"Never mind, Grace, it's all over now."

"No, Miss, but 'tisn't—or it ought not to isn't—where's them as didn't know how to manage a boat? and she as caused the upset—what's going to be done to her? She ought to be hung—suppose you *had* been drowned, why 'twould have been worse than the murder the other day—it beats the murder smack!" and she began crying afresh, under the influence of her strong feeling of indignation against the cause of my misfortune.

"I think I will try and get up, Grace, if you will assist me," I said, for to return to London was now my most anxious desire.

"Bless'e Miss, you musn't think of such a thing."

"I'll try, however," and made the attempt;

very weak and faint I felt, but I continued to get through the process of dressing, and received the congratulations of Lady Ravensden thereon.

"Come down into the drawing-room," she said, "there are plenty of people there, and it will amuse you."

"O, no! not if that is the case," I cried, "I shall afford fine amusement for them, drowned rat as I am."

"Nonsense—you must come, they're all praising you up to the skies; calling you a brave, heroic girl, and I don't know what."

"The very reason why I could not present myself amongst them, I have not the least wish to be so 'lionized,' especially when I feel that what I did was an act neither of bravery nor heroism—when does your ladyship think of returning to town?" I asked somewhat anxiously.

"Whenever you are well enough to go, my dear, was her reply. "I've no wish to stop here, particularly as this unfortunate accident was a sad *damp* to the party last night, and though Mrs. Houlton is too kind to feel other than most sympathetically, some of the guests,

selfish animals, were annoyed at this extinguisher coming upon their jollity, and look upon us as the cause of it."

"But did it put a stop to the entertainment?"

"Why, of course at first, the sensation created was a painful one, but when it was ascertained that no life was lost, or limbs broken, the music recommenced, and dancing was resumed, and 'pop,' 'pop' went the champagne bottles as cheerily as before; but Mrs. Houlton left her guests to come to you, and so the affair flagged rather, and they did not keep it up to the late hour they would have done, had it been otherwise."

"I am sorry for that."

At this moment, a servant came to inform us that Lord D'Arville had arrived; I went down to see him, but requested that I might be shown into a room in which were no other guests. I was conducted into a little study, where, for a few minutes, I awaited his arrival.

"Upon my word, Miss Isola," he exclaimed as he entered, "a precious fool you've been making of yourself! getting yourself made the town-talk—where's your sense of propriety?"

"I am not aware," I replied, "that I have committed any breach of propriety; I couldn't help falling into the water."

"I suppose you 'couldn't help' rushing in after that fellow, like a madwoman? you 'couldn't help' subjecting yourself to the remarks, which, had you reflected for a moment, would be made upon such outrageous conduct. Where's your sense of decency? upon my life I don't know what to do with you—a girl who would act in such a manner must be mad—you're not fit to be at large, Miss Brand, you must be placed in a lunatic asylum."

"What is all this fuss about?" said Lady Ravensden as she entered the room.

"Ah! how's your ladyship this morning?—just talking to Isola about this unfortunate affair yesterday; hem! why she might have been drowned—makes one shudder to think of it."

"Yes, that she would, but for that noble, dear creature plunging in at the moment and saving her—he ought to have a medal for it."

"I don't see that, it was what any man would have done, nothing more than—I should have done, had I witnessed a similar scene—

of course if a man sees a woman drowning, he pulls her out—ahem.”

Lady Ravensden laughed quietly, and my guardian gave her a furtive glance, whilst a gleam of anger shot from his eyes; he stood resting his hands on the back of a small chair, which he tilted to and fro, and I saw that it was with some effort he maintained his composed manner.

“Well,” he said at length, “I think Miss Brand’s ‘season’ has been brought to a close with great *éclat*,” (and he sneered as he spoke) “and the sooner after this, she returns into private life again to recruit her health, the better, when can you part with her, Lady Ravensden?”

“Part with her? not at all yet, she requires attentive nursing now, which I shall give her; I dare say you can amuse yourself a little longer without your ward.”

“At all events I must try to, it seems, as your ladyship is so peremptory, but why you should be saddled with the trouble of nursing this young lady, I don’t know, my aunt—”

“Tut, man, I never give myself *trouble*, it is a *pleasure* I’ve planned for myself, and you

won't deprive me of it, so you had better say no more about it."

"O! have it your own way, Madam," was all Lord D'Arville said in reply, but he muttered a curse between his teeth, as he turned to leave the room.

When Mrs. Houlton, our kind hostess, heard of our intention of returning to town, she strongly opposed the plan, on the ground that I was not equal to it, and as Charles Compton was also suffering from severe catarrh, she said that she felt responsible for both of us, and would not allow us to run the risk of increased indisposition by taking such an imprudent step as we contemplated. She was really very kind, and I think perfectly sincere—so we stayed that day.

I kept quiet, glad to rest my aching head on the soft cushions of a luxurious fauteuil. Leila, at my request, joined the company below, and endeavoured to soothe her mother, whom the affair of the previous day had made very nervous; while Lady Ravensden established a friendship with everybody, and was the life and soul of the party, as I was informed.

It was very still in my room; with my

window open all I heard was the soft murmur of the river flowing past, and the sigh of the breeze amongst the flowers, with an occasional sound of voices in the distance. The stillness was very sweet, but it made me sad, it so encouraged reflection. The events of the previous day were acted over and over again—in my mind's eye I saw everything as in a glass, and my feelings were awakened as the events passed in review, with a keenness—a susceptibility that was agonizing.

Again I sat beneath the beautiful acacia ; step by step he came nearer, and the throbbing of my heart came back again ; there was the cold greeting—the converse, distant at first, but bringing us nearer as we talked on. There was the deep sense of enjoyment, as we floated down amongst the lilies, and the soft shadows, and the glowing sunshine, with the river's tide ; the fulness of happiness as our eyes met, and I felt laid upon my heart, the soft balm of sympathy ; gently as a dream, it glided in, and soothed that heart's beatings and flooded it with a joy—so pure, so calm, that it seemed less of earth, than of heaven. And then came the fearful moment, when,

plunged deep, deep beneath the waves, I faced grim Death—the ecstatic thrill that came with the sense of preservation by his hand—his—Lionel! and then, oh! horror of horrors the wild agony of seeing him sink into those awful depths, perhaps lost to me for ever, meeting himself, with the same death from which he had delivered me. No, no, he must be saved! and again the madness of that hour came over me, and I would have faced danger and the grave. The cold dew stood on my brow, and like a vision, the pale, ghastly form I dragged on shore, rose before me, and I clasped my hands, and wept in agony; and then I fell on my knees and prayed—prayed for him, as the “brother of my soul!” fervently, but purely, that prayer was breathed forth, an angel he might have been—for all that there was of earthly in my thoughts at that moment, yet dear, dearer than life had that being become.

CHAPTER VII.

"The tongues of mocking wenches are as keen,
As is the razor's edge invisible,
Cutting a smaller hair than may be seen;
Above the sense of sense : so sensible
Seemeth their conference : their conceits have wings
Fleeter than arrows, bullets, wind, thought, swifter things."

SHAKESPEARE.

" * * * The world is grown so bad,
That wrens may prey where eagles dare not perch :
Since every Jack became a gentleman,
There's many a gentle person made a Jack."

RICHARD III.

"I HAVE received a letter from Captain Howard," said Lady Ravensden, when she came into my room on the following morning.

"Ah!" I cried, and stopped, almost afraid of asking a question, but gazing at her with an earnest look, which strove to read the news

in her face; it was very grave, and my heart beat fearfully.

"Yes!" she said, slowly, "it was a great pity Mr. Grey persisted in rushing off as he did—"

"Why—what—what? Ah! Lady Ravensden!"

"My dear girl, do compose yourself, it is no more than one might have expected; feverish symptoms manifested themselves on his arrival in town, and—but I am wrong in telling you, as you are exciting yourself so much about it."

"No, no; you must, dear Madam, tell me—tell me the worst."

"Then that is, that he was in a high fever, when Captain Howard wrote—"

"And he will die!" I exclaimed, convulsively pressing my hands together. "Oh! let me go to him! will your ladyship kindly give the necessary orders for our return to town? It seems so dreadful for him to perish, and all through me. Oh! why did he save me!"

"Hush, my dear;" said Lady Ravensden, soothingly, "we can return immediately, if

you wish it—if it is any consolation to you, and I confess I am very anxious about the brave fellow myself, and would wish to be near him. I do not think he has a mother, and perhaps, old woman, as I am, I may be some comfort to him.”

How I blessed her for that thought!

“But you, my dear girl,” she continued, “are not equal to removing to London, yet, and if you excite yourself in this way, I will not answer for the consequences.”

“A short drive like that? it will do me good,” I cried, “but I shall work myself up into a fever, here.”

“Very well, then,” was her ladyship’s reply. “We will return home this morning.”

We did so, but previously to leaving, I was obliged to present myself in the drawing-room, to say “adieu” to the family of my hostess, and it was an ordeal I would thankfully have been spared.

There were several daughters, and a good many visitors in the room, who had all been witnesses of my accident and its result, and my entrance consequently was not unregarded.

Two or three people greeted me with genuine kindness, congratulating me upon my providential escape from so imminent a danger, as the one by which I was threatened, when I had disappeared from their sight, beneath the waters.

"It was such a fearful scene!" cried one lady. "I shall remember it as long as I live."

"Dreadful!" exclaimed another; "but what ever could you think of rushing into the water again for? Once out—I should have kept out, I'm sure. It was like tempting Providence."

"I think Miss Brand ought to have a piece of plate presented to her by the Humane Society," said a lady, still a "miss," in a tone which had an immense deal of sharpness and acidity in it; "and as to Mr. Grey," she continued, turning to me, "he ought to devote his life to you. I shall quite expect to hear of your becoming Mrs. Grey after this," and she gave me, as she spoke, a look full of malice.

"No, no," said Mrs. Houlton, our hostess, "there is no obligation on either side, as two negatives make an affirmative; so in this case, these two obligations destroy each other, and

make the affair negative—if Miss Brand saved Mr. Grey's life, she was indebted to him for the preservation of her own."

How nicely her adroitness, so kindly exercised, had released me from an unpleasant position! There was a titter, however, amongst the impudent girls of the party, and several of the older ladies subjected me to a close scrutiny through their eye-glasses. Leila looked exceedingly annoyed, thinking, dear girl, that it would embarrass me to be thus made "a live wonder;" but having anticipated some "demonstration" from what Lady Ravensden said, I had braced up my courage for the encounter, and now presented a calm front to the enemy.

The "miss" who had expressed herself so strongly relative to Mr. Grey's presumed gratitude, and who was addressed as Miss Arrow-smith, for some reason seemed bent on trying to annoy me.

"Are you as dangerous to persons wherever you go, Miss Brand?" she asked me with a half sneer, "falling into the water, and endangering the lives of two gentlemen, in rescuing you, must not be done every day."

This Miss Arrowsmith was considered to bear a striking resemblance to good (?) Queen Bess, the same thin, sharp features—small deep-set eyes, and hair of that equivocal shade, which when possessed by the refined is dignified by the name of “auburn,” but when adorning the head of the vulgar, is designated as carrot-colour.

She had some cleverness and shrewdness about her, but appeared to me to be wanting in feminine softness, which, perhaps, was what made Mr. Compton say, that “Miss Arrowsmith was not an interesting looking person ;” and Captain Howard remarked on the day of the fête to Charles Compton, that “Arrowsmith was too sharp by half, and he had a suspicion that her arrows were poisoned ones ;” thinking probably of the Scripture passage, “They shoot out their arrows—even bitter words.”

Mrs. Compton and Leila with Charles, who now considered himself convalescent, left when we did.

It was with deep emotion that I looked upon him once more ; having been a prisoner in my room till the time for my making my “fare-

well," I had not seen him at all since that dire moment, when faint and exhausted, he was forced to relinquish his hold of the form he had perilled his own life to save.

I think my feelings would have overcome me, and that there would have been a scene, had it not so happened that the moment of our meeting was the one in which I was stepping into the carriage; when, in the bustle of collecting shawls, saying adieux, and being frightened at the freshness of the horses, there was no time for the development of embryo feelings.

It was very gratifying though, to see that he did not look much the worse for his share in my adventure.

"It is beginning to rain," exclaimed Lady Ravensden, "you must come with us," she said to Mr. Compton. "You've been watered enough lately, without getting another wetting to-day, and if your aunt and cousin can't part with you, they must come with us too: there's room enough in this Noah's Ark of a coach to hold a dozen people."

Leila and her mother were in a German britscha, the head of which being put up

afforded them shelter, and saying they could exist without Charles for a time, he accepted Lady Ravensden's offer.

As we drove along, a powerful impulse seized me to thank him for the noble part he had acted in that scene, which I could not think of without a shudder, but happily I restrained myself; the thought of how my feelings might be construed, the actions to which they led, having been so canvassed, made me silent.

In my heart, I thanked and blessed him, while my dowager friend rattled away her commendations of his wise conduct, in a strain of hyperbolical laudation which Charles in vain endeavoured to check; at length her ladyship's remarks took another turn.

"Queer sweepings those we've just left," she said, with a laugh.

Mr. Compton did not appear to understand her; but she proceeded.

"Mrs. Houlton herself is a superior woman, but where she collects all those unmannerly cubs, and half-bred girls from, I cannot imagine. I've been in a foreign land, I think, during the last few days."

"You forget, Lady Ravensden, bankers are obliged to think of the shop," said Mr. Compton, "and their society is always of a motley description; Belgravia, Tyburnia and Bloomsbury, meet at their bankers as on neutral ground."

"Defend me from such a meeting again!" cried the old countess.

"I thought your ladyship was above the 'exclusiveness' of your position, and entertained more liberal views," said Charles Compton, somewhat nettled, for of all things aristocratic, pretension was most offensive to him.

"You quite mistake me, Mr. Compton, 'exclusive' and proud I am not, nothing to my mind is more petty and contemptible, than entertaining such feelings, for what are we all, but dust and ashes, every one of us? The poor and the lowly born are as welcome at my house, as the rich and noble, provided they behave themselves properly, but that's what these people do *not* do. Endeavouring like the frog in the fable to rival the bull in dimensions, these little people, spawned heaven knows where, puff and puff, and blow away, in efforts at their aggrandizement, till they

make themselves the jest of all people of sense by their absurd ambition. Their vanity blinds them to the fact that their superiors in station are only employing them as useful tools in their own upward path, and inflated with pride, and elated with their imaginary success, in rising above their former condition, these trumpery things assume airs and graces in consequence, and as usual in such cases, invariably ride rough-shod over their less fortunate competitors; this is what more particularly disgusts me with the whole class of them."

"Human nature, Lady Ravensden."

"Then it's a phase of human nature which is especially repugnant to my feelings; the higher ranks have their faults, and very gross ones too, and here and there amongst them stand out glaring examples of the fact; but you would find few amongst them, guilty of the rudeness and vulgarity which shocks one in these specimens of human nature; pride, if no better feeling, dictates a courteous bearing; and soft words, whether sincere or not, are pleasanter to the ear, than the grunts of unmannerly bears."

"Give me a truthful grunt, in preference to a dulcet lie," said Charles, with some energy.

"But the grunts are not truthful," pursued the old lady, "it is a mistake to suppose that because people are ill-bred, that they are more candid and sincere than the polished and refined, they are only more awkward if they endeavour to practice a deception, and disgust instead of delude."

"I would rather be disgusted than deluded, I think," said Charles, laughing.

"None but a ninny would be deluded," continued Lady Ravensden; "you take gentle manners for what they're worth, and he would be a goose, indeed, who would be deceived by them. All I object to is, the overweening conceit of these nobodies, the blown out, blustering style of these well-fed, but ill-educated animals. I can overlook a little vanity in those who have risen to eminence through their own talents and superiority; but when you see men and women who owe their rise to nothing but a happy accident of fortune, mouthing in vile grammar, and strutting in plebeian attitudes, I

must own I wish that these times of fortune-making had brought with them a better style of manners. Railway fortunes have brought with them railway manners, and puffing, blowing, blustering manners they are; nothing can be done fast enough, and even young ladies in a ball-room resemble runaway engines, dashing along in railway galops, with full steam on."

"Hurrah!" cried Charles Compton, "the very thought intoxicates me, but admit, my dear Madam, that the spirited style of everything is an improvement upon the heavy Sir Charles Grandison, bagwig time, or the later stiff, unnatural fashions of the 'Regent era.'"

"Certainly, when the schoolmaster has done more, the next generation will; or ought to, far eclipse the present and the past in every way, morally, physically, and intellectually, and in the enjoyment of life; by that I mean, in having more appliances for comfort, and in the facilities afforded them for travelling and seeing the world."

Charles Compton, of course, thought that no times could be preferable to the present. Lady Ravensden maintained that they could,

and expressed her firm conviction that the feverish steam crisis over, a brighter period would arrive.

"An argument in my favour can be drawn from the records of the past," she said. "For instance, in that one point of manners. A queen, now-a-days, would not, when informed that her arms had been victorious, give vent to her feelings in the strong language used by the maiden queen enjoying her goose dinner, when she heard of the defeat of the Spanish Armada; nor would a lady of the present day openly and unblushingly pursue the evil courses in vogue in the reigns of the Second Charles, and the First and Second Georges."

"Openly and unblushingly?" cried Charles Compton; "no, that's why I like to have everything clear and above-board. I hate sneaking and pretence; and there's an infinite deal too much of it in the present day."

"Bravo!" I exclaimed from my corner, "you're convicted on your own evidence."

He saw how, in his love of contradiction, he had contradicted himself, and joined me heartily in the laugh we had at his expense.

I say "we;" for I was for the moment so much amused as to yield to the expression of merriment ; but the aching anxiety at my heart quickly returned, and my thoughts fell into the one channel ; slowly and painfully struggling on between hope and fear, one comfort only I had—I was approaching nearer and nearer to *him*.

CHAPTER VIII.

"*Valentine*. and is she not a heavenly saint?

Proteus. No; but she's an earthly paragon."

"Tant va la cruche à l'eau, qu'à la fin elle se casse."

SOME days have passed. Mr. Grey is "very ill—very ill indeed."

Lady Ravensden has been to see him several times; and I notice that she is always grave when she comes from seeing him, and will not tell me much in answer to my anxious questioning; but she says that I am making myself ill in my anxiety, and that I am very silly, as I could not help what had occurred, and that fretting will do no good.

I know that; but can I help it? I can settle to nothing, neither music, nor painting, nor reading have any charms for me. But I

wander restlessly about the house, and the only incidents in the day are, when the servant returns with an answer to the question asked several times a day, of "How is Mr. Grey?" or when Captain Howard calls to report progress of his patient; for like a good Samaritan, he has turned aside from his flowery path of pleasure, to bind up the wounds, and soothe the sufferings of his friend.

I was in the drawing-room one morning when he called.

"Well! what report this morning?" exclaimed Lady Ravensden, as he entered.

"Delirious still, I am sorry to say; but the doctors expect a crisis soon, and then—" He was looking at me while speaking; and whether my look of pained inquiry struck him, and he thought it better to say no more, or whatever it was, he did not finish the sentence. I concluded, however, that it was a question of life or death, and that on the mysterious crisis hung all my hopes; yet, round it clustered all my fears.

Leila sympathized most sweetly with me in my anxiety, entering into my feelings with a delicacy which endeared her to me tenfold, yet

rallying me in her lively way, to prevent my yielding too much to my feelings.

I declined going out on the plea of indisposition ; but she would frequently come and drag me off to spend a quiet hour or two with herself and mother.

What happy days those would have been, but for that one blighting thought—of my friend suffering, and perhaps dying through me ! I could enjoy nothing with that fear withering my heart.

Yet Leila did all she could to amuse me ; chatted and laughed, and played and sang by turns, volatile creature as she was !

Nothing seemed to dim the bright eye, or shade the sunny smile of Leila Compton ; her life flowed on like a smooth unruffled stream ; no rude winds disturbed its surface, no obstacles lay in its pathway, and I often drew comparison between her and others less favoured.

Lovely, gifted, wealthy, and beloved, she was truly Heaven's favourite ; without a want or wish ungratified, she offered one of those rare exceptions to the general rule of sorrow and suffering here below ; and my surprise,

and often my anxiety was excited, when I gazed upon the unshadowed brilliancy of her beauty ; it was almost with superstitious dread that I looked forward to the future of one, hitherto so blest.

Dear Leila !

Numerous admirers followed in her train, and I was wont to accuse her of being a sad flirt. Her eyes were so beaming, her smile was so sweet, and manner so playful and fascinating, that she beguiled many into the belief that such charms must be developed for the enthrallment of one alone, and each fancied himself the favoured one.

I will not say that she was unconscious of her influence, she had too many ways of hearing it ; or that she wholly disregarded this gift of beauty which she possessed ; but she could not help charming—the grace, the playfulness, the sweetness, were all natural to her, and she pleased without the slightest effort.

Were I writing a history of her, instead of jotting down a few incidents in the life of Isola Brand, I might make a book of lively interest ; but it need be written with fanciful silver ink, and my pen is too heavy to guide the delicate

liquid, or to trace in characters sufficiently dainty, the romantic historiettes connected with my charming sylph.

Amongst all the slaves at her feet, no one in particular seemed to excite her interest, or move her compassion, and I often wondered how she could be so insensible, and like to wound so many hearts, without healing one ; but she would only laugh and say :

“ Dear Isola ! do you imagine those men possess hearts ? I’ll admit that their animal economy requires an article of the kind, and, of course, I don’t speak in a literal sense ; but it strikes me, that men of the world dispense with it generally in its moral signification, or it becomes so warped, or so callous with usage, that it loses all its soft, spongy, nice qualities, and for all the good it is to them, they may as well be without it ; now look at Mr. St. Leger, can you fancy him really in love ? ”

I laughed to myself as a slight suspicion crossed my mind that I could, and that if I had not seen the “ veritable ” passion displayed, I had witnessed a very fair semblance of it.

“ You forget, dear Leila,” I said, “ that the fiery, sanguine youth, changes in time to the

cool and sobered man, and much intercourse with the world, acts like time, and ages one with marvellous rapidity. I feel older now, since I commenced this London season, older by years, than I did before. Do you remember those lines in "Festus."

" ' We live in deeds, not years—in thoughts, not breaths,
In feelings—not in figures on a dial,
We should count time by heart throbs.' "

"Just so," exclaimed Leila, "and they illustrate mine, too; anything, whether it be one's dress, or one's muscles, or one's feelings by constant use, must get worn out in time, or if not exactly 'used up' (to express myself in a term of Charles's) they lose their freshness."

I thought I knew an instance to the contrary; of one who had mixed as largely with the world as most men, and who yet retained, pure and unsullied, the feelings of early youth.

"As a general rule, I think you're right," I answered, "but it is yet possible, I am sure, to meet with many exceptions to that; and when you do meet with men who have had every worldly experience, and yet carry with them 'airs from Heaven,' which Wordsworth

will tell you come into the world with us at our birth, but fall from us one by one like 'snow flakes' as we come in contact with the things of earth—I cannot remember the lines exactly just now, but that is the idea they express—those men are to me much more interesting than others; their feelings are not chilled, nor withered, nor callous, they are only more matured, like wine by careful keeping, and their hearts are a rich treasury of thought and feeling. Yes, I am persuaded that it is the abuse, not the use of the heart which wears it out; if it preserve its healthy tone, and no violent sweep of sorrow cracks the strings of that most delicate of instruments; it will throb on with varying pulsations, wakening sweet music to the last."

"How long, Isola, have you made the heart your study? it strikes me that you have been diving into the subject with all the desperate energy of your character."

"The horses are at the door, Ma'am," interrupted our conversation.

"Come, Isola, dear! do have a ride to day. Hassan will fret himself to death if his mistress neglects him so long."

I shook my head ; I could not have mounted him in my then state of mind, had it been ever so ; the indulgence of any personal enjoyment seemed almost wrong—selfish—so I took my leave, promising to call the next day.

* * * *

I did so—but oh ! the instability of all earthly things, for once that sunny region where my bright Leila held sway, was clouded.

On entering the drawing-room, I immediately perceived that there was “something wrong.” Mrs. Compton was looking frightened and sad, while Leila’s countenance wore a thoughtful expression, very unusual with her.

Charles was standing at the window, but turned to welcome me, when I noticed that he was pale, and looking strangely grave for him ; immediately afterwards he left the room.

“Poor Charles ! poor boy !” exclaimed his aunt as the door closed upon him, “we have had bad news this morning, Miss Brand.” Mrs. Compton never would depart from her custom of addressing me by my surname.

I expressed my sympathy in a few words, of course, though unable to imagine the

nature of the intelligence received, till Leila said.

"It is Charles you must pity, news has just arrived that the bank in which the greater part of his fortune was placed, has failed! It is true, that it was not a large sum, but it afforded a sufficient income for him as a single man; but now, till a maternal uncle dies, who has promised to make him his heir, he has comparatively nothing to live upon, what will he do!"

There was a tone of deep sadness in Leila's voice as she spoke, and the tears trickled down her cheeks.

I felt truly grieved, but said I hoped that when the affairs of the bank were examined into, his loss might be found less heavy than was supposed.

Leila did not seem to think this likely, and Mrs. Compton took an equally desponding view of the matter.

"No, no! the poor dear boy is ruined," she cried in a sorrowful tone. "I can see no hope for him, brought up to no profession, what can he do!"

"I am afraid," said Leila in a broken voice,

"he will be thinking of emigrating, either to America or to Australia—these newly discovered gold fields, they talk so much about, are luring away many in his position—poor Charlie!"

Her head drooped, and for once the light which was wont to cheer others, burned dim.

"He need not go abroad, I should think," was all I could say, "with his talents, and educational advantages, it will be very easy for him to get on; and then," I added with a laugh, "uncles cannot live for ever, you know, so that the case is not so bad after all."

Leila smiled very faintly.

"Oh, but what vexes me," she said, "is that whilst we have plenty, and more even than we require, he should be in want of anything, and he is so proud—he declines—he will not accept—he is a wilful, wayward, incorrigible *creature*." She cried in an excited manner, and with almost angry emphasis upon the last word.

I thought how blind some people were, and was surprised to find that the scales had only just fallen from my own eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

"His years but young, but his experience old;
His head unmellowed, but his judgment ripe;
And in a word (for far behind his worth
Come all the praises that I now bestow),
He is complete in feature, and in mind,
With all good grace to grace a gentleman."

TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

THE crisis had come—"the worst was over, he would do very well now."

Oh! the tearful joy of that intelligence! the hope, brightening day by day as a better and still better report was given, till at length I heard that the poor patient could sit up; "and I think," said Lady Ravensden as she communicated to me the pleasing intelligence, "I think you might go with me and see him, poor fellow, it is the least you can do."

The blood rushed to my heart, how I longed to see him—yet dreaded the meeting.

“Certainly,” I said, “your ladyship knows best—I mean—when shall we go?”

“I’ve some shopping to do first, but we can call in Jermyn Street afterwards.”

“Very well.”

The shopping seemed interminable, I wished there was no such place as Howell and James’, and no such things as shawls and laces and similar trumpery to awaken the powers of fascination of smooth tongued clerks, and to enwreath in their costly folds confiding old ladies; I quite hated the men, as one thing after another came in review, and felt really irritated against her ladyship for wanting so many articles, yet, when at length, the very last purchase was made, and the carriage slowly re-entered, and after some moments (to me half hours) of orders, we turned into Jermyn Street, I became so nervous as almost to wish myself going in another direction.

But we stopped—we were at the door, alighting. A woman, rather young, and respectably dressed, opened the door; she was

the landlady, I believe, and she shewed us up into the drawing-room.

The house appeared to me very old, and the staircase narrow, and somewhat dark, creaked terribly; I noticed this staircase the more from being detained upon it by two gentlemen meeting us in our ascent; when a scene of backing on their part, and hesitation on ours, took place.

The drawing-room as we entered it, looked I thought very gloomy, the furniture was heavy—the horse-hair sofa and chairs, dingy curtains, the oil-cloth cover to the table, the tarnished gilding of the small glass over the chimney, and the shabby appearance of a few soiled artificial flowers in a broken china vase—all this revealed itself at my first glance.

And then my eyes fell, my heart was beating strangely.

Lady Ravensden was speaking, and I heard the low murmur of another voice, and felt half inclined to rush out of the room, and down the stairs again.

Mr. Grey had entered from the adjoining apartment, and whilst answering her ladyship's numerous questions, did not perceive me, as

I stood behind the dowager ; but the latter turning round, brought me into notice.

“ You don’t see who I’ve brought with me,” she said in her lively manner. “ Miss Brand, allow me to present the man Grey to your notice, who perilled his life a short time since, to save that of a young lady ; you may remember the circumstance, she fell into the water, and he, without a moment of selfish calculation, rushed in after her—and saved from the eels and fishes, the belle of Mayfair.”

Long before this introductory speech was concluded, we had greeted each other by a silent pressure of the hand, and I had ventured to lift my eyes to his face—the world of expression there was there !

I dared not think what were his feelings, but a pang shot through me as I noticed the effect of illness and suffering on his countenance.

It was pale as marble—the blue veins traced their meandering way visibly beneath the transparent skin, the features, too, had an unusual delicacy about them, while the eyes, into whose spiritual depths I had never dared to gaze, had an etherealized look, which filled

me with strange awe; was he really going to die after all? was that solemn unearthly expression the shadow of the grave?

Sadness like a cloud descended on my spirit, and gave birth to tears.

But I was not alone in experiencing emotion, a rising moisture soon veiled the eyes of him my heart called "Lionel," while those of the merry Lady Ravensden glistened as she talked on, and occasionally she passed her handkerchief across her face in a most suspicious manner.

As she busied herself, for a moment, looking at some books which lay upon the table, Mr. Grey bending forward in his chair, addressed a few words to me.

"What happiness this is!" he said; "during the dull days of my illness, I thought more than once, that I should never see you again on earth, you little know what I feel in seeing you, and how can I tell you—how express all that I have thought and felt, and suffered—how deeply—" He was completely overcome by his emotion, and I would not allow him to proceed.

"Not now—not now," I murmured, in

accents as broken as his own, then rallying my feelings in the fear of making a goose of myself, I turned to Lady Ravensden and said :

“Your patient is still in very low spirits, what can we do to rouse him ? your ladyship is so happy in invention, that I am sure you can easily devise some method of chasing the spirit of melancholy with which he is possessed.”

“I’ve been thinking on the subject,” was her reply, “and the conclusion I’ve come to is, that as soon as possible he must leave these dingy, dark, dreary quarters, and get away into the country ; I don’t mean, you must know, by ‘the country,’ some desolate region, where muddy roads and reeking pigsties will be all you see ; and geese cackling, and a donkey braying on a common, is all you will hear, Mr. Grey ; but some place uniting fresh air and other advantages of rural life, with cheerful society and good dinners. Now I shall be going down shortly to visit my son and his wife at their place in S——shire, and as I’ve *carte blanche* for any visitors I like to take with me, the best plan would be for you to accompany me thither ; Miss Brand I shall

walk off with also, if she'll let me. What do you think of my plan?"

Mr. Grey laughed as he answered, "I should indeed be guilty of insane folly in not approving of a plan so full of promised enjoyment, and as your ladyship has kindly undertaken my cure, I must show myself a good patient, I suppose, and do as I'm bid."

"Then that's settled, and now the question is, when shall we go? the sooner the better, I say, as the season's over now, and the charms of this choking, smoking place having departed, we may as well go elsewhere — spoken like a worldling now, was it not? get all you can out of a thing, place, or person, and when you've squeezed it dry, like a lemon, seek an advantageous change."

"Lord Ravensden has hardly been in town at all this season, I think," observed Mr. Grey.

"No, his wife has been ill, she had a rather serious indisposition whilst they were in Ireland in the spring, which obliged her to renounce the gaities and fatigues of a London season; and like a fond ninny of a husband, as he is," she said with a laugh, "my boy

would not leave her invalidish ladyship—too good by half, as she could have dispensed with him gladly; however, they're going to spend the next month or two at their little place, Ashwoods, and will, I suppose, be entertaining a few friends; they go to Paris for the winter. What ponderous tomes are these which you've been studying?" she cried suddenly, "why, man, you don't attempt, surely, to feed your brains upon such dry stuff as this?"

"Ha, ha, it seems so to you, I dare say; but I can assure your ladyship that political economy is to me a most interesting study, and these statistics are invaluable. I pore for hours over these and similar volumes, and they lead me to reflect deeply. Statesmanship, like everything else, requires study, not only of generalities, but of details, and a man who (as I am) is desirous of being useful in his generation, must submit to a little drudgery. All the oratory in the world is thrown away, if a man display an ignorance of facts, eloquence must be supported by reason and sober truth, to create more than a momentary effect; but, unfortunately, too many men of the present

day rush into parliament, who are supremely ignorant of matters it is most essential they should know ; they take feeling, and very often mere caprice as their guide, and if they do happen to possess 'the gift of the gab' at all, they occupy the time of the House most egotistically in making fine oratorical displays, and mouthing flowery speeches, which are duly transcribed in the journals, glanced over, and forgotten. Their wives and families like to see 'pa' in print, and their constituents think they've returned 'the right man,' one who does not mind trouble and will not shrink from his duty ; but these are not the men who ought to govern the country."

"Well, Mr. Grey, I shall hope to see you occupying one of the high places of the earth yet," said Lady Ravensden cheerfully.

"A lottery, Madam, and I do not rate my abilities so highly as to imagine that I am specially fitted for filling any important post ; if fortune favour me, well and good, but I shall not resort to any humbug to gain an end, however desirable."

"Quite right, though the present is such an age of chicanery, that an honest, straight-

forward man doesn't stand much chance. Appearances are everything, now-a-days, and he who can make the best show, and has the largest stock of impudent pretension, carries the day; and as we hear of golden ages, and iron ones, I think the present should be called the 'age of brass,' for most true it is, that a man who has brass enough, can do almost anything. Well! I shall stay chattering here all day, tiring you out, so adieu! and we'll arrange about the Ashwoods plan, it's one for which I give myself great credit."

* * * *

"And that is the way in which gentlemen who are bachelors, live, is it?" I said to Lady Ravensden, as we proceeded on our way. I had never thought upon the subject before, and the recollection of the dismal horse-hair concerns, the begrimed gilding, and faded flowers, crossed my mind. "How dull they must be, and uncomfortable!" I exclaimed.

"O! not at all," said Lady Ravensden, "they only sleep at their 'rooms,' as they call them; they dine and half live at their clubs, and as they're out every night at

parties, they don't spend much time at 'home.' They'd cut their throats, if they did."

"Poor fellows!" and the thought of Mr. Grey suffering, and indebted to the services of hirelings for any attention he received, impressed me and haunted me strangely. Captain Howard, for the kindness he had shewn his friend, I should like as long as I lived, but his interest being awakened, was quite accidental; "what a pity Mr. Grey had no near relation, whose duty and privilege it would have been to nurse him!" Reflecting thus, Mr. Grey seemed quite an aggrieved man, and I wished I had chanced to have been a Sister of Charity, and then, I thought—no, perhaps it was better not so; and at last, I came to the conclusion, that I ought to think no more on the subject, for they all said he was recovering fast, and when restored to health, what would he be to me?—nothing!

Yet the world had talked, had coupled my name with his, till I shrank from hearing it spoken by familiar lips.

The world seemed a very cold, unfeeling place, very different to what I had imagined it to be, when I built aerial castles, and dreamed

beautiful day-dreams, in connection with this same world.

For dramatic effect, I had certainly conceived great wickedness coming to light, occasionally, but somehow or other, it never in my fanciful musings came near me ; and the minor shades of it, the faults, failings, and little unpleasantnesses of people, such as selfishness, meanness, the love of scandal and detraction, and petty busy-bodyism, were too unromantic and uninteresting to find any place in my *tableaux*.

The coldness and hardness of character which one encounters in real life, are not imagined or anticipated by the young, who endue with their own energy and fire all the actions of which they hear. In their Aurora-like freshness, they cannot conceive such a thing as a heart becoming faded, 'neath the burning noon-day heat of passion, or of being made callous, or else worn out, by the attrition of the rough world ; but every day gives them a lesson in this lore, and in other things besides.

I learnt something one evening. I had given a holiday to Grace, and she was undress-

ing me for the night, on her return from spending the day with some of her friends. She seemed very eager to tell me something, but the pre-occupation of my thoughts prevented my caring to hear her communication.

At all times she was very loquacious, and occasionally I was amused at listening to her simple talk ; checking her tendency to gossip, and endeavouring to raise her ideas to the level of my own.

This evening, however, I did not give her much encouragement to speak at all, and she kept fidgetting about in a very excited manner, and asking me a variety of unnecessary questions, about my dress, hair, &c., till at length she could contain herself no longer, and taking two or three very deep breaths, she suddenly exclaimed,

“ Beg your pardon, Miss, but will you please to be so kind as to let me tell you something ? ”

“ Is it very important ? will it not keep till to-morrow ? ”

“ No, Miss ; I must tell it to somebody or other, or 'twill burn through me, and set me all a-fire. ”

I laughed. "You're a droll creature, Grace."

"Maybe, Miss, but I never could keep nothing on my mind ; no, not if I was to die for telling of it, and if you don't want to see me a-busting out all in flames—you'll let me speak, Miss, and I'd rather tell it to you than to anybody else, Miss."

"Very well then ; what is it all about ? Something very important, I dare say ; but whatever it is, you mustn't make it a long story, or I shall go to sleep before it is concluded."

"No, Miss, but 'twas so cur'ous, and so dreadful-like, that it makes me all of a trimble to think on."

"Some silly ghost story, I have no doubt. My poor Grace, I thought you'd been wiser."

"Ghost story, - indeed !" she cried, contemptuously. "No, Miss, I ain't such a noodle as that neither. My heyes is black and sharp, and I've got my observations about me ; and as to all that ere nonsense 'bout sperrits, I don't believe of it ; and 'tis only ignorant people as does."

"Well then, is it a murder? What is it?"

The glass reflected a frown on my irascible Grace's face; and she suddenly came to a tangle in her combing operations.

"Mussy 'pon us! your 'air do get so long and thick, Miss, that the 'airdresser need come and do it himself every time. *Murder!* indeed!"

"Come, Grace, you've roused my curiosity. Tell me all about it."

"Oh! 'twasn't much to tell—for the matter of that, nothing. Do I brush too hard? Poor dear Missie! I'se bin a-hurting of its little head! Didn't mean to do it, there now. Well, Miss, I was going to say, this afternoon, as you'd been so kind as to give me an holiday, I thought I'd go up and see some friends of mine as lives up in St. John's Wood—she's from our place in the country, Jenny Waters, old Dame Waters' daughter; and she's married a pleeceman here up in town, and takes in washing.

"Well, Miss, she and I was taking a walk; for says she, 'You can't think what pretty bowers there is in these parts—as pretty as the

country every bit ;' and she took me about to see 'em ; and we walked down so many roads, and I didn't know which was the pleasantest, when suddenly we hears the beautifullest singing and playing music ; and it comed from a little house standing back in a garden.

"So says I, 'Stop a bit, Jenny, don't you be such a go-ahead—let's listen to the lady singing.' Twasn't Miss, you know," she said, "but what I've heard lots of singing in my time ; only I was drawed on as it were. So we went nearer, and stood right under the wall at a corner. Well, she sings and sings, but presently she stops, and I hears voices talking, which makes me prick up my ears like a donkey (not that I am a donkey for all that), and then I hears a laugh—that laugh, Miss ! there warn't no mistaking it ! Ah ! my ! if it didn't make me jump !

"So I looked up through the trees, and saw a window open ; and there came and stood at it—who *do* you think, Miss ? It really was—though I could scarce believe my heyes—that stuck-up thing, Beevor !"

"Nonsense ! Grace."

“It *was*, Ma’am. I’d seen her so often when I’ve been up at the Castle to see Mrs. Bounce ; and I’m pretty ’cute. I know’d her, though she was dressed most elegant, and tossed her head about, and seemed for all the world like a fine lady ; not like you, you know, Miss—not a solid, nice, proper lady ; but—I can’t tell’e, Miss ; but I know what I mean.”

“Well, never mind.”

“But that’s not all, Miss, not near all,” stopping short after a pause ; “and I don’t like to go on.”

I said nothing ; but a secret to Grace, being, as she informed me, a combustible article within her, I waited for the explosion, which presently came.

She fidgetted about for some time, every now and then taking deep breaths, as she had done prior to commencing her narrative, and endeavouring to appear interested in my unrobing process ; but it would not do. I expected to see her enwrapt in flames, according to her own assertion every moment ; but at length she broke out, with an appearance of great relief.

“ Ah ! and there was somebody else there, too, that she was talking with ; and I knew *his* voice as well as Beevor’s, every bit ; and by-and-bye I see’d him come forrard, and stand at the window alongside of she ; and there couldn’t be no mistake—not as I was a living, moving creature, with my heyes and ears all open—and ’twas *he*, Miss—my lord ! Lor ! if I didn’t feel fit to drop down ; I was in sich a trimble, and the cold pesperation came out on my forrud. He didn’t see *me*, though,” she added, “ they neither of ’em didn’t. She was a flirting-like, and saying short things with her sharp sounding voice that rings like milingtary heels along a pavement ; and he was a twirling his whiskers, and laughing, my lord was, till his little heyes were twinkled up into little bits of metal ; but glad enough I was to turn to right about, particklarly as a set of fellers from the barracks was coming by—imperent fellers ! And then as we turned the next corner, what should we see but my lord’s cab a-waiting. Ain’t it dreadful, Miss ?—sich goings on ! I’m sure I thought I’d have ’sterics ; it give me such a upset like. And the thought of that creatur, it quite

took away my appetite; and Jenny for the life of her couldn't make out why I was took so; but I couldn't help it—I couldn't abear to see sich goins go, and felt quite fainty and pespiry all tea-time a thinking what a stuck-up Beevor 'twas, and wondering whatever my lord—ah!”

I drew my own conclusions.

CHAPTER X.

"The fox knows much, but more he that catcheth him."

OLD PROVERB.

"The good are better made by ill:—
As odours crush'd are sweeter still."

ROGERS.

THE thought of my guardian had now become hateful to me, and it grew more and more horrible day by day; his presence which he inflicted upon me frequently, was like a nightmare; it oppressed my spirits so much, that nothing but the unvarying cheerfulness of Lady Ravensden upheld me; her vivacity acted as a counter charm to the leaden heaviness beneath which I felt buried, when in his lordship's society.

There was an authoritative tone in his manner, which I should not have minded in him, being, as he was, my guardian, if it had not appeared to be assumed for the purpose of balancing, as it were, the disadvantageous position, in which as a lover, I had placed him.

My undisguised dislike was mortifying to his vanity ; whilst my indifference to his threats, was a wound to his pride ; how to bring me into submission without using positive force, he did not know ; yet why did he leave me with Lady Ravensden, who paid him no more respect than she did her butler ?

I was fairly puzzled. Her lively ladyship was no favourite of his, I could see very clearly, and had seen it from the first, even when her eccentric little note informed me of the existence of an unknown friend.

I remembered the annoyance he manifested on that occasion, and on others since, in connexion with Lady Ravensden ; and the more I thought upon the matter, the more I was perplexed ; I should have been enlightened on the subject, perhaps, had I been present during the whole of a conversation which on one occasion took place between them, but that being or-

dered to retire, I did so, and remained as mystified as ever.

It was a day or two after I had accompanied the dowager on her visit to Mr. Grey, that being alone in the drawing-room one afternoon, Lord D'Arville was announced.

The first glance at his face, showed me that my guardian was labouring under no ordinary excitement; he was very pale, his lips were set, and there was a look of savage fierceness in his eye, which for a moment terrified me: his step, too, was quicker than usual, and betokened unwonted interest in something or other.

He scarcely received my greeting, but throwing down his hat and cane upon the sofa, confronted me with an expression of anger on his countenance, which would have appalled some girls.

"What am I to understand by this?" I said with some surprise, "what is the matter with your lordship?"

"Matter, Madam, matter! how dare you look me in the face and ask? You presume to feign ignorance—not to *understand*—you require an explanation? Know then that, I'm

come to demand an explanation from *you*, and one I'll have too, full and explicit, or—"

I really thought he was going mad, I had never seen him so enraged before, his eyes positively glared with anger as he went on,

"You dare to defy me, do you? in spite of my caution, in spite of warnings, you persist in your rebellious conduct, in opposing my wishes, and in running counter to my positive commands! you *persist* in doing this? what do you mean by it, Madam? I say what do you *mean*?"

He drew so near me as he spoke, and seemed so carried out of himself by passion, that unaware of the precise act of rebellion of which I had been guilty, I did not know, in my terror at his insane appearance, what to answer him.

"Why don't you answer? are you dumb? This acting won't do for *me*," he cried, as he stamped his heavy-heeled boot upon the floor. "I ask you, how—you—dared—to go to—that—that *fellow's* rooms the other day? I ask you what you could be thinking of? where your sense of propriety was? how—in fact—you—my ward—could presume." He was actually foaming at the mouth, and passion,

assisted by his tight cravat, had so paralyzed the muscles of his throat, that he seemed in danger of choking, and could not articulate.

I felt quite shocked and disgusted at such an exhibition of demoniacal temper, but at length found words.

"Your lordship is accusing me in a most extraordinary manner," I exclaimed, "I did not go alone to see Mr. Grey, I accompanied Lady Ravensden, who thought it but proper that I should do so, knowing him to be suffering and half dead through me."

"You hadn't done enough for him already? you hadn't outraged every feeling of propriety by your conduct at that water party? you hadn't shown yourself destitute of every decent sentiment, which as a gentlewoman you ought to have possessed? You hadn't forgotten the position which, as my ward, you hold? and more than that—"

"You've said enough, Lord D'Arville," I interrupted, "there's no use in recalling the events of that day. I am not ashamed of the part I performed on that occasion, and should act in a similar manner, if the scene could be enacted over again."

“ You would—would you ? then let me tell you—but no—go on—reveal yourself in your true character. I like to find out what you’re made of ; give a woman her tongue, and she’ll turn her mind inside outwards, before your face ; go on, darling,” and he assumed an ironical manner which it was hard for me to bear patiently ; however, I mastered myself with some little effort, and said quietly.

“ I do not see that I committed any very great breach of propriety, or even of etiquette, in calling to see the preserver of my life, under the *chaperonage* of an elderly lady, occupying the position of Lady Ravensden.”

“ That *infernal* old woman !—don’t mention her name to me,” he exclaimed, in a voice none the less fierce, from the tone being subdued—indeed, if anything, it acquired more intensity of savageness from its being concentrated ; it had a hollow, cavernous sound. He bit his lips, and looked like a tiger chained, but he gave no explanation ; he did not say why he hated her so, or why, entertaining such feelings, he had permitted me to be with her ladyship at all ; or why, though he abused her in

her absence, he was always obsequiously polite when in her society.

For a few minutes, he sat as if considering how he should commence another attack upon me, and I was thinking how I could with the best grace quit "the presence," when the old lady herself entered. She looked gay and animated as usual, and advanced with a smile.

"How do you do, my lord? not melted away yet? this weather is enough to soften the feelings though, is it not?"

"Hem—I like it—I can stand any degree of heat almost, I'm naturally chilly—but your ladyship looks—"

"Oh! it kills me quite," and she panted, "dead very soon, if this weather lasts—felt flaming all last night, must be off out of town as soon as possible."

"I suppose so, everybody's on the wing now, and where do you think of going to, may I ask?" he was still trembling from the effect of his fit of passion.

"Down to Ashwoods."

"Ha! indeed."

"And I'm going to walk off Miss Isola here, do you know that?"

His lordship looked as if he had suspected it from the first, but thought fit to feign astonishment, as he exclaimed with a laugh.

"Come now, nonsense, Lady Ravensden, I'm sure you've been troubled enough with that young lady. I cannot think of trespassing any further upon your goodnature. I am extremely obliged for all the kindness which your ladyship has shown Miss Brand ; but there are limits, my dear Madam, limits which I could not in consideration for you, exceed."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked the old lady. Lord D'Arville laughed, and used his handkerchief—saying at length.

"Your ladyship is the very essence of goodnature—ha—couldn't be more so, but I do not wish to take advantage of it, I should be quite ashamed—"

"I dare say you would be, but you may lay shame aside for once ; in this case you need have no compunction."

There was a pause, during which my guardian looked exceedingly awkward, and Lady Ravensden was preparing some wools for fancy work, with her accustomed perfect ease of manner.

"Really," begun Lord D'Arville, "I must talk this matter over with you. I—a few moments with you," and he glanced at me as if I were an obstacle to the desired conference; "perhaps Isola—" but I had already risen, and was leaving the room.

"Stop, my dear!" said Lady Ravensden, looking up at me as I passed her; "why are you going away—nonsense—stay here."

"It is better I think," interposed my guardian, "pray let her go. I have not had a chat with you for a long time; and she can feel no interest in what we have to talk about."

"It strikes me now, that she would feel a great deal," and her ladyship stepped forward and detained me as she spoke.

"Madam! pray release the girl, or if you will not grant me the interview I have requested, I must wish you good morning."

The old lady who had only detained me for a moment, to annoy his lordship, released me; and right glad to escape, I left the room.

The result of this conference with "closed doors," was the defeat of my guardian, and arrangements were soon being made for our departure for Ashwoods.

There was a vague something—it might have been apprehension, or pleasurable anticipation—fear or hope—I know not which, that rose fluttering within me, whenever I thought of the coming weeks ; but the feeling is common to our early years, when any change is in prospect ; on this occasion, however, my straining gaze into the future was more than usually eager, and the mingling lights and shadows, chequered my pathway most dubiously, as I looked onward.

The violent scene with my guardian, and his strange softening down at the entrance of Lady Ravensden, had contributed to mystify me still more, with regard to the nature of the influence which she manifestly possessed over him ; it was strange, unaccountable, and I was lost in wonder ; but it was in vain I sought an explanation from her ladyship ; she always evaded my questions, and turned the course of my remarks, with an adroitness which fairly misled me.

I came to the conclusion that she was a wonderfully clever old lady, and congratulated myself upon having such a kind, staunch friend, who was able to manage my disagreeable guardian so much to my advantage.

The Comptons were no longer in town, or in leaving it I should have experienced one regret—though one only.

Charles' loss of property they felt as a misfortune to themselves, and many were the lamentations they made over this sad blow to his prospects; with the sufferer himself, however, the case was different; his was not a mind to be easily daunted, it acquired additional strength in combating difficulties, and knowing that this ill stroke of fortune must be met, he determined to face it boldly.

He felt the reverse which had come so unexpectedly upon him, as keenly as any other young man in his position would have felt it; but he did not sit down to bemoan himself, and curse his fate, nor did he spend a very long time in considering what he would do.

He gave the subject the full consideration of his clear head and vigorous mind—took counsel with an experienced friend, in whose superior judgment he had confidence, and in a few hours from first hearing of the unexpected change in his circumstances, he had decided what course to pursue; had sold his horse,

dismissed his groom, and made other arrangements to meet his straitened means ; and had likewise adopted a profession.

Anatomy and medicine had always possessed a peculiar interest for him ; and in the midst of other studies, he had, as an amateur, given much time to the study of both.

He determined on turning that study to account ; and that life, which had often appeared so void of purpose to him, that he had almost wished in his heart that he had been called to a life of toil, instead of the easy, indolent existence, apparently his lot, was suddenly invested with an interest, hitherto unknown.

There was no romance in this, nor was it a freak of fancy which made Charles Compton turn with something like pleasure to the prospect of study and toil ; the truth is, he was no Sybarite, loving to loll on cushions, and dream away existence in listlessness and inaction, nor the shallow being whose sole care is to dispose of that precious "time," which he can never bring back again—employing for that laudable purpose all the nameless inventions to which empty heads and idle hands have recourse.

His ardent mind panted for action, and the Art which Hippocrates and Galen made classical, was the one which he determined to follow, with the strength of his mind, and much of the affection of his heart.

The medical profession stands, or ought to stand, next to the clerical in dignity; the latter ministers to the soul's wants in its transit through this world of sin and sorrow, and with grandeur of thought and aspiration, looks beyond the grave, to promised immortality; but the former is also noble, and dealing as it does with the suffering portion of humanity, drawing forth as it ought to do, the finer sympathies of our nature, it may lead to reflections grand and beautiful also.

The field for action it opens, is extensive, the good that may be done, immense; and holy and glorious must be the feeling of the man, who, heart and soul devoted to his task, spends his time, his talents, and his energies, in relieving the wants and miseries of his fellow men.

Sweet must be his memories at the close of a life of heart-devotion to his duties! The "blessing of him that was ready to perish,"

falls on many a member of that devoted band, and God their Creator's blessing also rests on them and their labours.

For this profession, I thought Charles Compton eminently qualified, and was very glad to hear of his decision, heartily wishing him "God Speed!" in his new career.

• He lost no time, but set to work in a most determined manner; the sneers and derisive pity of his club friends, or rather acquaintances, were nothing to him; and he really seemed to feel a pleasure in exchanging their society for that of "nurses" and "dressers;" and the fresh air of the park, for the less breezy atmosphere of the hospital.

Lord D'Arville looked on this young man with supreme contempt; he could not understand a temperament so electrical—a spirit so pure, and a nature so vastly superior to his own.

Of contracted mind himself, he viewed every person through the diminishing lens of his own mental vision. Unless he or she belonged to a certain *clique*, and occupied a position in *his* world, which was the only one he knew anything about, he looked on them as "nonentities," persons it was not necessary

that he should be acquainted with ; indeed he invariably made a point of ignoring their existence, if by any chance he had been brought in contact with such outlandish animals, on any extreme occasion, and accident blew them across his path again ; they were " people " he should be ashamed of being seen with, and therefore could not honour with his notice.

Any originality of thought, or eccentricity of manner he condemned, and an exhibition of feeling was vulgar to a degree.

An extravagant display of the kind, we all know to be *mauvais ton*, as calculated to create " scenes," frequently embarrassing, and sometimes painful, and therefore in general society to be avoided ; but to incase himself in an armour of mean, contemptible pride, of insensibility and stupidity, is the mistake many a worldling makes (ah ! and many a she-worldling too,) and while he thinks the common herd is worshipping this image of noble dignity and equanimity, he has no idea that the animals comprising it, are only avoiding him as a being inferior to themselves in everything that constitutes " a man," and

holding his assumption in ridicule and contempt.

“Ye see yon birkie ca’d a lord,
Wha struts, and stares, and a’ that
Tho’ hundreds worship at his word,
He’s but a coof for a’ that,
For a’ that, and a’ that,
His ribband, stars, and a’ that,
The man of independent mind,
He looks and laughs at a’ that.”

CHAPTER XI.

"A mighty mass of brick, and smoke, and shipping,
Dirty and dusky, but as wide as eye
Could reach, with here and there a sail just skipping
In sight, then lost amidst a forestry
Of masts; a wilderness of steeples peeping
On tiptoe through their sea-coal canopy,
A huge dun cupola, like a foolscap crown
On a fool's head—and there is London Town!"

BYRON.

LONDON was becoming anything but a pleasant residence, beneath the raging sun of the dog-days; every hour saw travelling carriages closely packed, and other vehicles more humble, bearing off their loads of pale faces, to be freshened up in the purer air of the country, or to the places of embarkation for the continent.

The streets presented a deserted appearance

and were unpleasantly odorous ; the girls in the pastry-cooks' shops had leisure for needle-work, and the young men at the linen-drapers' indulged in novel reading.

You felt as if you had been left behind ; forgotten by the world ; and your artificial existence being suspended, the love of Nature awoke again, and you began to sigh for fresh breezes, sweet flowers, and all the country delights of summer.

I thought of all the lovely places where the glorious season would be so enjoyable, and bygone summers on the banks of Lake Leman, came to mind, raising within me an ardent longing to be up and away.

Lady Ravensden's departure from town was delayed some time, by little matters over which she had no control, and this delay was annoying to us both. I, especially in my invalidism, felt it terribly ; I quite panted to be amongst fields, and hedgerows once more, and frequented Kensington Gardens as the nearest approximation to rural scenery within access. If they lack the simplicity of the country, those lovely gardens in their rich cultivation, possess a beauty of their own, and

English people may well be proud of such noble parks in the vicinity of their dingy, smoky, ugly capital.

I am only half English, so I do not hesitate in applying the term "ugly" to modern Babylon; without the picturesqueness which in a greater or lesser degree, distinguishes other capitals having claims to antiquity, casting a halo of interest round objects in themselves common, it possesses none of the beauties generally seen in cities which are the growth of our own days.

There is a want of classical, architectural beauty, and of artistic arrangement and effect; no one general idea pervades the whole, but the "nation of shopkeepers" has contrived to have a capital as varied in styles, as the nature of its merchandise.

Englishmen may be proud of its extent, of the vast riches it contains, and of the great treasure borne to it on the bosom of its noble, but very dirty and polluted river.

It may likewise boast of its miles and miles of private residences, unrivalled in comfort by any other city in Europe; but there let the boastful tendency of the Englishman be brought

to a check, let not his self-complacency delude him any further ; but if his bull-dog obstinacy incline him to dispute the point of his country's inferiority in any one respect to other lands, let him widen the circle of his views, and enlarge the size of his ideas by travelling, and judging for himself.

It is possible, however, that he would not then admit, how muchsoever he believed, that he had previously lived in ignorance, and he would return, still maintaining that there was "no place like London after all."

Many people feel the same blind doating affection for their country, that some weak, vain parents do for their offspring. However glaring their faults may be in the eyes of others, the authors of their being can see nothing in them but charms : "every crow thinks its own the fairest," to use a vulgar phrase, and there are thousands who would maintain sooty-faced London, to be the fairest of cities.

On the one point of parks and gardens, however, the Londoner may be proud, and boast his superiority ; where can you find equalled the grand old trees in Kensington Gardens ? Those long park-like avenues, and

the miles of soft emerald turf, fresh and luxuriant, close to the vast metropolis?

But for Kensington Gardens, London would have been unendurable to me, in the close, heavy atmosphere of the dying summer.

Even the motley crowd assembled there on a band-day was amusing, but the solitude of a morning ramble there was delicious. I would sit for hours under the trees, which spread their wide green arms like kindly giants above me, revelling in the deep, sweet stillness, broken only by the tinkle of a sheep-bell, and the faint murmur of vast London.

Reflection assumed her reign in my breast at these times; life and destiny rose in mysterious solemnity in my thoughts, and long would I ponder upon them.

But a little while before, the world which, in its ordinary sense, I had not entered, was the "terra incognita" of my dreamings, but now it was no longer unknown; in a short time I had made large acquaintance with a certain class of my fellow beings, and of them, I had seen quite enough; from the senseless round of fashionable gaiety, there is something to be gained, and that "something" is the knowledge

that a properly endowed being is not sent into the world to follow the course of pleasure alone; those who do so waste the time and talents a beneficent Creator has given them, reap more pain than profit from their reckless search after amusement. Satiety is sure to follow, and in many, if not most cases, a feeling of dissatisfaction which sours the temper and colours darkly the mind; and at the close of life, the unhappy consciousness oppresses the votary of pleasure, that long, long years have been wasted, thrown needlessly into the abyss of time, that there is no regaining them, no bringing them back—there lie precious golden moments, gone for ever, while before him rise darkly and sternly the thoughts of Eternity, fearfully, so fearfully sometimes, that we would gladly veil the image from our hearts, of a man thus facing the grand, but to him, dread idea.

It was only this fashionable phase of the world which I had seen, and to have a more enlarged acquaintance with my fellow beings was now my desire, but in the trammels of society, in which I found myself, it was no easy matter.

How could I break through the rules established by an imperious decree, and mix freely with all classes, studying as I wished to do, the thoughts and feelings of each.

I dreaded this "class" system, having noticed its effect in so many cases ; what was my guardian—but a pleasure-automaton ? and he was only one of many—very many ; might not I become in time as worldly, as narrow-minded, and as useless for all good purposes as his lordship ? I fervently hoped not, without any pharisaical feeling either, I believe, but merely by drawing a few contrasts.

I thought of Lady Bernard, bigoted, cold and ignorant, yet professedly not a worldling, and I contrasted her with Lady Ravensden, warmhearted, generous and charitable ; and felt convinced that it is not the life we lead, so much as the spirit in which we lead it, that renders it injurious, or otherwise, to our moral temperament.

But it was not always in this vein that my thoughts ran, they took a wider range far ; a little German mysticism sometimes crept into my musings, and most delicious reveries they were ; strange, perhaps, for a young girl, being

of a more metaphysical nature than I could perhaps have expressed in words, so fine are the threads of thought. But, alas ! poor weak woman ! what has she to do with philosophy ? too often these strange musings, were only efforts to divert my thoughts from another channel, and they generally ended in descending from their airy flights, and circling round one object—my poor sick friend.

The incidents of one day, had revealed to me, in part, the extent of my feelings ; and I trembled as I discovered the powerful nature of the spell which was cast around me.

As long as the result of his unselfish courage, was a case of life or death, it was only reasonable and right that I should feel deeply interested in his fate, but the danger now was over, he was fast returning to health, and the concerns of life ; yet, did I not think as much about him, as when I was in danger of losing him for ever ?

Did I not dwell upon the looks and words of a time, which seemed “ long, long ago ? ” take in review all the incidents of our acquaintance, and conjure up bright anticipations of the coming weeks to be spent in his society.

And then my dreams were clouded. I recollected the Lady Lucy, her beauty, her distinguished position, and the familiarity of her manner towards him, whom I ever treated with almost childish respect ; and a pang shot through my heart.

How was it possible I could ever think of rivalling *her*.

I remembered his coldness on many occasions ; was not that fair being in his thoughts, and had he—oh ! had he penetrated my heart, seen the lurking secret there, but found no answering feeling in his own breast ?

The agony of that humiliating thought !

And then the water-party came to mind, with its torrent of terrible recollections at which I still shuddered ; and a sting entered my soul at the cruel remarks of that unfeeling girl, Miss Arrowsmith, imputing to me hateful motives, and coupling my name with *his* so coarsely ; and perhaps she expressed the opinions of others besides her own ? My guardian was not the only person it might be, who considered my conduct bold and unwomanly, and suppose he, Mr. Grey, should be of that opinion !

And further, after all that had passed, was it

possible for him to consider me as having a claim upon him for saving his life, and imagine himself bound under such circumstances to offer me his hand, in gratitude?

Oh! mercy! spare me a suspicion so terrible! If that were really to prove the case, and he were disposed to do violence to his feelings from a delicate sense of honour, there was but one course for me to pursue, at once to make up my mind to discourage all his advances; and should he, in spite of this, proceed further, to refuse him firmly, let it cost me what it might.

Having come to this decision, with what altered feelings did I look forward to meeting him again! No longer as a kind friend with whom I might hold "communion sweet," but as one before whom I must ever be on my guard, in whose presence I must keep every display of feeling in check, whom I must not care for, whom it were well, never to admit into my thoughts.

What a constant struggle this would be! and from a pleasant anticipation, my visit to Ashwoods became changed into a matter for apprehension. I almost wished we were not going there; it would be, I felt assured, a great

trial ; and I shrank like a coward from the encounter.

A trial of another kind, however, came upon me first, in a letter from my guardian. It ran thus :

“ My dear Isola,

“ My visit to you the other day, though partly for the purpose of expostulating with you upon a course of conduct likely to subject both you and myself to many unpleasant remarks, had yet another object ; but the entrance of Lady Ravensden put an end to our interview, and I choose the present method instead of appointing another meeting in her ladyship’s house, to inform you upon a matter in which you are interested.

“ I am sorry to be obliged to tell you that you have lately sustained a considerable loss of a pecuniary nature. Owing to the mismanagement of our fool of an agent, Mr. Sniggleby, and the general depreciation of West India property, I find the returns from your estates much below what I have been accustomed to receive from them, and seeing no prospect of improvement, but the very reverse, I think it

my painful duty to inform you that there is every probability of your being, very shortly, a *beggar*.

“ This, I have foreseen for some time, but out of consideration for you, have deferred making a communication which may, and probably will, have the effect of damping your spirits.

“ Knowing the fate hanging over your head, my annoyance at seeing you form an attachment to a man, who is utterly unable to support a wife, can be imagined. I would save you from misery. I would do more ; and once again advise you to avail yourself of an offer, which common prudence dictates you should accept.

“ There is no use in reasoning with one who is wilfully blind, I know, and your fate is in your own hands—you can rise or sink at your own sweet will ; one thing, however, my duty as your guardian obliges me to mention.

“ Having lost your means of subsistence, you will have to exert yourself for a livelihood, and turn your talents to account in the best way you can—as your betters have often been obliged to do before you.

“ It would be useless for me to suggest any-

thing to a person so self-sufficient and competent in every way to think and act for herself; but I may tell you, I suppose, that in any plan which you may think proper to propose, provided it meets with my approbation, I shall, of course, be very glad to assist you. More than this, I cannot say.

“Think the matter over, and let me hear your proposal shortly.

“Yours truly,

“D'ARVILLE.”

A “beggar !” a “beggar !” a lean, miserable wretch, dragging her weary limbs from door to door, begging bread : a poor working girl with thin white fingers, hungry cheeks, and sunken eyes, shedding tears over the stitches as she sews them ; a music mistress striving to implant in other's souls the sweet harmonies breathing in her own ; toiling day by day, alike in rain and sunshine, cold and heat, still battling on in the same war of sounds ; an artist, or an author, with nervous hand and aching brow, fagging early and late to reproduce the effect, or tell the tale, which gleams in bright colours upon the mirror of his mind,

and if thoughts and ideas come not, striving to produce them ; and after all, bartering the darling children of his fancy, for bread, bread !

Such visions as these rose before me in the instant after my perusal of my guardian's letter : the world, too, with its gaping wonder, its insulting pity, and its vulgar scorn !

I felt sick and faint ; but only for a brief moment.

Poverty was not dishonour, it was a crime only in that coarse world's eyes, and labour was honourable, and its reward sweet ; I must be up and doing ; but what—what ?

I thought of Charles Compton, and how singular it was that a similar fate should have befallen us both ; and how I longed to possess his decision of character, his cool, quiet courage, and brave heart, to face the ills I saw gathering around me.

* * * *

“Why, Isola, my love,” exclaimed my dowager friend, when I entered her room, an hour or two afterwards, “what has happened ? you look strangely thoughtful.”

I explained ; adding, “I am come to ask your advice, Lady Ravensden, what do you

think I had better do? I do not wish to lose a moment's time."

"Do? why nothing at all at present, but try and be quiet. I heard all this the other day from D'Arville, and well I rated him for not looking after your interests properly. Furthermore, I told him that it was a somewhat mysterious matter, which ought to be inquired into, and threatened to speak to my man of business on the subject; which frightened his lordship nicely as you may suppose."

"You are very kind indeed, but my position is in no wise altered; if it is a fact that I shall shortly be a beggar, it is also a fact, that I must work for my living; and the sooner I begin the better."

"You'll do nothing of the kind, Miss Isola, unless you wish to offend me mortally; you'll take good advice from an old woman experienced enough to give it—you'll not trouble your young head with matters too deep for it, and you'll accept the home I offer you."

I kissed and thanked her for her proffered kindness, but said firmly, "I would rather do anything, endure anything, than be a poor dependant."

"Proud, foolish girl! will it not be trouble enough, and work enough to take care of me? to play a daughter's part to my whimsical, fussy, ridiculous old ladyship?"

"Ah, ah, that will not do," and I shook my head.

"But it *must* do," cried the old lady in a somewhat authoritative tone, "you must humble that proud heart of yours a little, and consent to accept kindness for a while from your father's old playmate and friend; so come, tell your maid to pack up your boxes, and we'll be off to Ashwoods at once—I won't be kept here any longer. Come, Miss, obey."

Such kindness was irresistible, and I found myself obliged to accede to my good friend's proposal; but I determined that it should be only for a time, and that the first opportunity which occurred, should find me ready to brace on the armour of a stout heart and a strong will, to go forth into the wide, desolate world.

CHAPTER XII.

"He is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest, that but seem to be so;
And will as tenderly be led by th' nose,
As asses are."

SHAKSPEARE.

"Who might be your mother,
That you insult, exult, and all at once,
Over the wretched? What though you have more beauty,
(As by my faith, I see no more in you
Than without candle may go dark to bed),
Must you be therefore proud and pitiless?"

SHAKSPEARE.

ASHWOODS was a hunting box of Lord Ravensden's, chosen by his sporting lordship, for its convenient situation in the centre of a good hunting country, and within the run of several packs of hounds.

Perhaps the term "hunting box," as applied

to it, savoured somewhat of affectation ; it was in fact a residence of some size, fit for the occupation of a man of tolerable income ; but it was not sufficiently large to accommodate the establishment of an Earl ; and during the period of the family's sojourn there with visitors, the domestics had to be quartered at the neighbouring cottages and stables.

It contained no rooms which could properly be dignified with the name of "reception rooms ;" but as Lord Ravensden and his countess resided chiefly at their seat in Ireland, and only spent a few weeks in the year at Ashwoods, it answered their purpose as well as a larger mansion.

The house was situated on a slightly rising ground, and commanded an extensive view of a fine open country ; there were but few hedges in sight, the fences, the few that there were, being for the most part, low stone walls of loose construction ; and the hills rose in barren downs, over which the sunshine chased the clouds, or mists hung in fantastic wreaths, enduing the brown heath with beauty ; and occasionally a strange spectacle was presented, by the gorze being fired, when the flame and

smoke spread from hill to hill, and the effect of the dancing fire on the dark hill-side was most singular and picturesque.

On our arrival there, in the waning light of a richly tinted sunset sky, when gold was changing into deep orange, and the glowing crimson into a blood-red hue, I thought the effect of the landscape, seen from the lone house, very striking.

On the tops of the hills, light still lingered, while on the eastern slopes, and in the dark hollows, were gathered dusky shadows, solemnizing the scene by their intensity.

The low of kine was heard, as troops of them wound their way homewards; and the music of a fife stole from the village which lay nestled at the foot of the hill.

These sounds were the only ones that broke on the ear, save the continual barking of dogs in every stage of life, from puppyhood to old age, which proceeded from the kennel, and proclaimed at once the tastes of the master of the house.

At the last stage to Ashwoods we had been met by Lord Ravensden, who was standing at the door of the village hostelry, awaiting our arrival.

"There's my boy!" cried the old lady on first perceiving him.

"How do you do, mother?" was pronounced in round genial tones the next moment, and mother and son embraced each other warmly.

"And how are you, my boy? how are you? *I'm* very well, as you may see, and have reached this break-neck, up-and-down hill place with whole bones for a wonder."

The genuine warmth of feeling displayed by both, at this meeting, was pleasant to witness; but after a few minutes, his lordship remounted his horse and rode on to announce our approach.

Arrived at the entrance door, we found him there to receive us, and assist us to alight; in the excitement of meeting her son, Lady Ravensden had not introduced him in set form to me, but she now remedied the deficiency by presenting him.

"Very happy, I'm sure," said his lordship, with some *gaucherie*, as he removed his hat, and then, rather awkwardly shook hands.

He was a very different looking person, to what I had expected to find him; the son of my wonderfully lively old friend, I imagined,

must be a "regular rattler." A talkative, dashing, carry-all-before-him sort of man; full of gallantry, and a handsome and rather impudent sort of "fellow;" but the gentleman whose acquaintance I now made, seemed nothing of the kind.

He was about the middle height, and in gait and carriage looked the "country gentleman;" in features he resembled his mother, but the expression of the face was but half inherited; there was the good nature without the shrewdness, and my first glance at him gave me the impression of a kind, easy-going man, without much, if any, intellectual vigour; the sort of person of whom it is usual to prophesy when he is in a state of bachelorhood, "he will, I am sure, make an excellent husband," which means that any clever woman can twist him round her fingers, like the string of her fan.

This impression was confirmed when we stood in the hall, with the gloamin light stealing in through the painted windows. The young countess did not make her appearance, at which Lord Ravensden seemed somewhat vexed, and after shouting "Louisa!" in not a

very polite manner, and rushing first into one room on the ground floor, and then another, he stopped the lady's maid who, at that moment, was crossing the hall, and asked where her mistress was.

"Dressing, my lord."

This reason for her not being present, seemed quite to satisfy his lordship; but I thought the dowager looked as if it had struck her, that her arrival being expected at that hour, and her son having gone on before to announce her coming, the young countess could have timed her toilet better, than to be engaged upon it at the moment when the duties of hospitality, as well as of family, required her to be welcoming her mother-in-law.

We were conducted to our rooms without seeing our hostess, and it seemed to me great remissness on the young Lady Ravensden's part. I quite felt for my dear, warm-hearted old friend.

On descending to the drawing-room, I found it, as yet, untenanted, and wrapped in the grey shade of twilight; however, I seated myself upon a couch in a dark corner, and in a minute or two, a servant entered and placing a

small lamp upon a console table, and beginning to light the chandelier, changed the scene.

Previous, however, to the completion of the illuminating process, I was startled by hearing a voice which I knew very well ; it proceeded from a person standing at the doorway, and addressing some one on the outside.

I had never known but one similar voice—that was Beevor's ; and it immediately struck me that she was engaged in the establishment.

Her voice had that ringing, metallic sound, which the French happily term *timbre*, it was capable of expressing much of tenderness or passion when the right cords were touched ; but when moved by anger or annoyance, its tone became peculiarly sharp and disagreeable, and this was so like it, that I gazed eagerly into the half darkness to see from whom the voice proceeded.

When I caught sight of the speaker, my first idea was for the moment confirmed, I thought it was Beevor, but as she advanced into the light, I saw that I was in error, and from the dress and appearance of the lady, I

conjectured that it was the countess who had entered.

“Miss Brand, how do you do?” she said, taking my hand; and I was convinced. “What stupid people these are of mine!” she exclaimed, “not to have lighted the room sooner—the plague of these creatures is intolerable; Bartlett—what were you thinking of?”

“Very sorry, my lady, I’m sure; I thought Philip, or some of the other people had done it.”

“Well, don’t think anything similar again, if you please; do your duty properly amongst you, or I’ll pack you all off—I’ll not be troubled like this.”

While the lady was thus in very questionable taste rating her careless serving-man, I had leisure to look at her; and I still found matter for surprise, fancying I could see a likeness between her and my *ci-devant* maid. She was infinitely better looking it is true, her glance was not quite so rat-like, nor her cheeks so pinched and hungry looking, and her hair was of a lighter shade; indeed, quite fair—but there was a similarity in manner, the same

quick way of speaking, and pert flippancy of style; and this strange resemblance, acted very unpleasantly upon me.

The association of ideas, inclined me to dislike my new acquaintance; but I struggled against the feeling, being unwilling and ashamed to permit myself to be so influenced by a mere fancy, which I felt this to be; and when she addressed me, I prepared to be pleased.

"You are fortunate, Miss Brand, in not being plagued yet by having an establishment of your own," she remarked.

As it struck me that management is everything, and that where the mistress knows her duty, the servants soon learn theirs, I said nothing to this, and her ladyship proceeded.

"You're come to a dull place, after London gaiety, Miss Brand; I don't know how you will exist here; but, however, we shall be having plenty of gentlemen here soon, and I dare say you know how to make them amuse you."

"The beauties of the country afford me so much pleasure," I said, "that I shall not lack amusement, I am sure, and shall be quite independent of the gentlemen. One great

resource of mine in the country," I added, "is sketching, and another—"

"O, are you fond of sketching? so was I once."

"And does not your ladyship keep it up now?" I asked.

"Dear me, no, one never does anything of that kind after marriage; I buy pictures instead, and if you're fond of paintings, I could show you some nice ones I've collected; by the bye—no—they're in Ireland."

I wondered why matrimony should be such an enemy to the fine arts, but my companion not seeming to care about anything just then but the arrangement of a stray lock of hair as she looked in the glass, I thought it better not to ask questions; presently with a shake of her bracelets, she seated herself on the sofa, yawning slightly. I never saw any one, except Beever, so completely and impudently at her ease; it was not the calm composure of good breeding which distinguished her manner, but a lacker imitation of it, and you saw at once, by its coarse grain, that it was not the genuine metal.

"I wonder," she exclaimed, "whatever *ma*

belle-mère can be about so long? these old ladies take such an immense time in adorning themselves; necessary, I suppose, when one gets to a certain age though; it must be a terrible thing to be old and ugly! but she's rather a nice old woman, is she not?"

I agreed enthusiastically in the last remark; but the idea of being old and ugly, which she seemed to hold in such abhorrence, I endeavoured to soften, saying how charming old age may be, and sometimes is, if the spirit remains young. A sign of impatience escaped her ladyship, and she cried:

"Nonsense, some old men, I'll allow are nice, but an old *woman*! can anything be more horrible? it disgusts me to see them, and at parties, and fêtes, and such places, they look perfectly detestable—ugh." And she made a grimace, and twitched her skinny shoulders. "I think," she continued, "it would be a capital plan if the system in vogue amongst some ancient nations, could be put in practice at the present day; namely, that of having very old people put to death; it was adopted then for the good of the community, and it would be a great boon to society, in these times." I

thought she must be joking, though that would have been unseemly enough, but I shuddered on perceiving that she was really in earnest ; she went on :

“ Very ugly people, too, ought to be compelled to wear veils or masks, and they should never be allowed to frequent public places, like theatres, operas, balls, or any nice thing of that sort ; nor to go there, even if they had good looks, unless they could afford to dress well.”

“ You would exclude the poor then entirely from places of amusement ?”

“ Certainly I would, when decent people were going ; I could enjoy nothing with any vulgar creatures within range either of my visual, or olfactory organs,” and she applied her scented handkerchief to her nose, at the bare idea of anything so dreadful.

“ But it strikes me,” I ventured to remark, “ that the poor should have their amusements.”

“ Of course, let them, amongst themselves.”

“ Yes, but would it not be cruel to debar them from enjoyments, which they are as capable of appreciating as ourselves.”

“ Impossible ! how can animals like the

poor appreciate music, or poetry, or anything nice?"

"Very well, I assure you, and if they cannot, it is for want of that education, which it is our duty to give them; we should endeavour to improve their condition, and share with them our advantages; then again, with regard to the aged, should we not strive to smooth their downward pathway as much as possible? and if they still take pleasure in the amusements of youth, why should we wish to deprive them of it, when we know that they cannot enjoy it long? It seems cruel."

The countess' face assumed a satirical expression whilst I was speaking; she looked at me, with amusement in her eye, and a sarcastic smile on her lip, and when I had concluded, continued staring at me with a fixed look, till at last she burst out laughing and exclaimed, as if she had met with some live wonder.

"What a queer girl, you are!"

I thought the class of heartless beings to which she belonged, much queerer.

CHAPTER XIII.

" * * * * * Remember thee ?

Yea, from the table of my memory
I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,
All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,
That youth and observation copied there."

HAMLET.

A FEW days passed very quietly ; I spent them for the most part in the garden, which lying on a sunny slope, and abounding in the choicest flowers, took my fancy vastly.

Previous to the late breakfast, I generally took a stroll there, and was almost sure to encounter Lord Ravensden, going the rounds with a gardener or two, giving orders or suggesting some improvement ; he seemed passionately fond of his flowers, and like all florists, was very proud of his beautiful nurselings.

After spending some time amongst the flowers, he would wend his way to the stables and kennels, if he had not already paid them a visit ; and I, at his urgent wish, occasionally accompanied him.

At first, the number, size, and savage look of some of the dogs terrified me, and I would take to my heels, in the most cowardly fashion ; but by degrees, I became accustomed to these rude favourites ; and as to the horses, I admired their "points" in such a connoisseur-like manner, and expressed myself so charmed with the animals generally, that I won golden opinions from his lordship.

"As soon as the hounds meet, 'Don Juan' is at your service, Miss Brand," he said very kindly. "He'll carry you over anything—hedges, ditches, and five-barred gates, won't you, Juan, my boy?" And he patted, as he spoke, the shining neck of a splendid fiery creature.

I hastened to assure Lord Ravensden, with many thanks for his kind attention, that I never made a she-Nimrod of myself ; that, although very fond of the exercise, a gentle hand-canter for ordinary riding, and occasionally a good

gallop over a breezy down, was the utmost extent to which my equestrian predilection led me.

“You surprise me! why Louisa, the countess, would ride at anything, delicate as she is, you’ve no idea of the spirit of that little woman.”

I had a faint suspicion of it, however.

In-doors, my chief amusement was novel-reading, the library containing an extensive assortment of them ; and they filled up “odd hours” nicely. I likewise made the discovery that her young ladyship, if she had neglected the quiet, unobtrusive accomplishment of drawing since her marriage, had still kept up her music. She was an excellent musician ; and it was a treat to hear her perform, which she would do occasionally in the evening, when in the humour.

When not in the mood, she would sit half buried in a *bergère*, looking very discontented and cross, and occasionally address sharp remarks to her lord, which, however, he would always answer kindly and quietly.

The dowager, meanwhile, seemed anything but comfortable. Usually so con-

tented and cheerful, she quite surprised me now by her ruffled manner. To her son, it was always playful and kind. She seemed to experience the greatest pleasure in his society, and he apparently warmly reciprocated the feeling ; but the younger lady appeared to me not to like this beautiful affection between mother and son. She would interrupt them if she saw them conversing together and despatch her husband on some little mission to the library or her dressing-room, on matters so trivial sometimes, that I wondered his lordship did not ring the bell, and transfer the order to a domestic ; but no, "Louisa" was obeyed.

She was the invalid, too, and exacted a great deal of attention from her loving spouse ; requiring a constant placing of footstools, and arranging of cushions, and other *petits soins*, for which she seldom returned thanks, but accepted them as matters of course.

Occasionally, I saw a quiet smile steal over the elderly lady's face, and sometimes a sigh followed. The meeting between the two countesses on the evening of our arrival at Ashwoods, had struck me as rather strange ;

I was sitting in the drawing-room with young Lady Ravensden, when her mother-in-law entered, and the former rose so slowly from the chair in which she was imbedded, that I could hardly believe they had not met before, she advanced a few steps, and said, in a familiar tone, as if addressing a child,

“ Ah ! how do you do, dear ? ” and offered her cheek to the dowager ; the latter answered coolly enough, and in the whole of their subsequent intercourse, I noticed a tinge of hauteur in my friend’s manner, which I had never seen her manifest towards anyone, and which I had fancied consequently, did not exist in her nature ; but the dowager-countess was no fool, and that her daughter-in-law knew.

“ Well, Miss Brand,” said my hostess, to me a day or two after my arrival at Ashwoods, “ what do you think of this for dulness ? I wonder you’re not half dead—it’s quite extraordinary how a girl like you can stand it so well ; as to the old lady, she’s thoroughly sickened already ; but this is the nuisance of being ill, I’ve been ailing now for months—it is disgusting. I don’t know, I’m sure, why I, of all people, should be ill.”

I saw no reason why she should not share mortal ills, but only said I hoped she would be restored to health shortly.

"Oh! I don't know, and don't much care; I wish some of these people who are coming, would come."

Having noticed several handsome residences in the neighbourhood, I asked if any of the families visited at Ashwoods.

"Yes," she answered, with a yawn. "Yes, some of them do, but I can't waste my time upon such antediluvian monsters as the greater part of them are; awful humdrums, they give me *les vapeurs noirs*, directly I'm brought in contact with their ill-dressed figures. I flatter myself I'm gifted with nice taste myself, and it's martyrdom to me to have the infliction of their society—so, you see, I lead a wretched existence here."

"Lord Ravensden," I said, "seems quite happy and contented."

"O, *he!*" cried her ladyship, with sneering emphasis; "yes, give him fresh air, and a garden, horses, dogs, and the 'Times' every day, and he'll fancy any place a Paradise."

"And does his lordship like Paris?" I

ventured to ask. My companion smiled and shrugged the miserable shoulders again, as she replied,

“He must like it, while I’m there. I suffer enough, without being deprived of that enjoyment, by consulting his tastes.”

Blind, easy husband! I felt quite angry with him for not insisting upon his tastes being consulted.

With such a companion, and the knowledge that Lady Ravensden *mère* was *ennuyée* to death, I became as anxious as anyone for the arrival of visitors, of one, at all events; and as day after day passed, and he came not, I began to grow uneasy, and to fear that Mr. Grey had had a relapse.

Captain Howard, who it seemed was a friend of Lord Ravensden’s, was also expected, and I looked forward with some degree of pleasure to seeing him likewise.

It was almost a matter of surprise to me that my guardian was not invited, but on making the remark to the old lady, she laughed, as she said,

“No, indeed, I think he would find it rather warmer here than he liked. George

(meaning her son) and he would never agree, and Madame Louisa doesn't like such old frumps of men as that; no, no, you're safe from the felicity of seeing him at Ashwoods!"

Here was one subject of gratulation at all events.

After some days of expectation and disappointment, the two gentlemen we were looking for, arrived. Captain Howard came like the rush of a whirlwind, and roused us delightfully; while Mr. Grey made his influence felt in an equal degree, though by different means.

He was looking very much better, notwithstanding that there were still sufficient traces of his recent illness visible in his appearance, to invest him with painful interest.

It went to my heart to see the shade still lingering on that face, and it required no slight effort on my part to conceal the feelings which agitated me, when his weakness and suffering were alluded to.

I felt drawn towards him strangely, but I dared not yield to the fascination; so many recollections, trifling in themselves, but important when bearing upon my relations with

him came to mind, and seemed to present a barrier to any tender feeling on my side, that I checked every demonstration which might be construed as evidence of any but simple, friendly interest. Yet it was hard to do so ; he appeared to seek me, and there was so much of tender kindness in the way in which he studied my wishes, and consulted my inclination, that I often reproached myself for the seeming indifference with which I received his attentions.

The evening of his arrival we spent very pleasantly and quietly ; while the light-hearted captain chatted to the young countess, who appeared infinitely amused with his lively gossip, Lord Ravensden and his mother sat apart conversing pleasantly together.

There remained then but Mr. Grey and myself, and I sat sketching designs for embroidery, and thinking how badly I was doing them, how crooked the lines were, and wondering what possessed me that I could not do them better : he rose from the sofa, on which he had been sitting opposite to me, and after making the tour of the room, came and seated himself as if quite accidentally by my side.

The pencil then ran every way but the right one.

"Have I offended you in any way, Miss Brand?" he asked.

"Offend me, Mr. Grey! how could you give me offence?"

"You will not even look at me," he said, "when I've come all the way from London, for the express purpose of seeing you; it is a sorry reception you have given me."

"I am very glad indeed to see you, Mr. Grey," I exclaimed, as I made a desperate stroke or two in the pattern, "you quite mistake me, if you suppose for one moment that I can ever forget the debt of gratitude I owe you."

"Gratitude!" he repeated in a wounded tone; "that debt, if any existed, has been fully paid; I have no claim upon your *gratitude*."

An awkward pause followed, during which my hands trembled sadly at their task; but after the lapse of a few minutes, Mr. Grey remarked in a cold tone.

"Lord D'Arville will, I suppose, be coming here shortly."

"I do not think he will," I said. "I have not heard so."

"Indeed ! how is that ?"

I replied that "I could not tell," which was the truth ; as Lady Ravensden's reason would have weighed nothing against the probability of his coming ; the mere fact of his being "an old frump" in the opinion of the hostess, and uncongenial in taste to the host, does not prevent invitations being often made to a person—made and pressed, too, in the false circles of fashionable life ; and not in them alone.

"Do you know, Miss Brand, that you're an enigma to me," said Mr. Grey at length.

"How so ?" I asked confusedly.

"Perhaps I may tell you some day," he answered after a pause, "but not now."

"Why not now, Mr. Grey ?"

"No—not now—this is neither the time, nor place ; some day when we are alone together, I will give you my opinion of your character, and if you're in a very gracious mood, perhaps you'll solve the enigma for me."

The Lady Lucy crossed my thoughts at this moment, and I said coolly :

"I think you must seek some other method of solving the mystery of my character, if indeed any mystery exist. I fear I should not much enlighten you."

"Indeed? You are changed then since we wandered together in the woods of D'Arville, and used to have such pleasant talk together in the picture gallery."

"Yes," I answered, rising from my chair to put an end to the conversation, for I felt a fulness in my throat, and thought that shortly I should be unable to answer at all. "Yes, I was very silly in those days."

"Silly! Miss Brand, were you? I never found that out, though I'm considered a tolerable judge of character; but your remark leads me to presume that since then you have gathered wisdom. I remember once hearing a text given out in church, which struck me rather forcibly; it was something about 'the sorrow of the world that working death,' and I fancy that its wisdom is of a similar character; that is the sort you have been acquiring perhaps, Miss Brand?"

There was a satire in this, which I should have fully understood, had it been said pre-

viously to my explicit denial to Mr. Grey, at that memorable fête at Fulham, of my engagement to my guardian; but now, I could not see its point, and remembering all I had heard about him in connexion with Lady Lucy Doveton, I thought the observation would apply as well to himself as to me; I did not tell him so, however, but making some commonplace answer, I turned away, and began begging the countess to favour us with some music.

Her ladyship declared it was quite impossible; that she played very little now, and that as to her voice, she had none left.

"Permit us to judge on that point, Lady Ravensden," cried Captain Howard,

" 'We must have music whilst we languish here,
To make the soul with pleasant fancies rife,
And soothe the stranger from another sphere.' *"

I am that stranger—the other sphere, London—I am 'languishing'—do the merciful, and fill my soul with 'pleasant fancies,' I beseech you!"

Thus urged, her ladyship complied; and

* Monckton Milnes.

rising languidly from the sofa, was conducted by Captain Howard to the instrument, to which Mr. Grey likewise lounged to turn over leaves, arrange lights, and make himself useful.

The song chosen was a sparkling French one, a brilliant chansonette, the words of which wert pert and lively ; but the singer contrived to fling a tinge of passionate bitterness in with the melody, and its effect became strange and touching. I quietly wished the old lady " Good night," and retired to my room.

Here, I fell to musing ; long I sat before the fire, which burned dimly, with a dull, red glare, in accordance as it would seem with my frame of mind ; and as I mused, my heart ached more and more, and I vainly battled with its pain.

The whole of the evening, I felt that Mr. Grey had been watching me ; I was conscious of it, without raising my eyes to his face, and once or twice when I chanced to meet his eye, mine fell beneath his gaze.

My woman's heart would not let me doubt the feeling expressed in that glance, and my

breast heaved with tumultuous joy as the delightful consciousness stole upon me that I was loved ; true, I thought of the Lady Lucy, and for a moment an indignant flush dyed my cheek, as I thought he might be only trying to fool me—flirting, as it is called in common parlance ; but it was easier far to believe him sincere. And then my equivocal position came to mind, the mystery which yet clouded my birth—my poverty !

It was evident he either did not know, or did not care for any of these things ; but could I in honour, with this sad knowledge pressing upon me, encourage his advances ?

I was perplexed, but determined to set a strong guard upon myself, upon my every thought and action ; never to betray my real sentiments—never to yield to the soft spell of his presence. It would be difficult I knew, and I began to think that this constant restraint put upon myself would be very irksome—very painful. I almost wished Mr. Grey had not come to Ashwoods at all—almost—not quite wished it : it was such pleasure to hear his voice, to feel him near me once more.

Thus I dallied with my chain — thus I sucked poison from the honeyed flower.

The following morning, our host and Captain Howard were off soon after breakfast with dogs and guns, for the enjoyment of a day's shooting.

Mr. Grey declined accompanying them, on the ground of having important letters to write, and the whole of the forenoon he spent in writing in his own apartment.

After luncheon, the dowager proposed a drive; her daughter-in-law did not seem disposed to stir from her arm-chair and novel, but I accompanied the old lady. The drive was dull enough at first, and I was so quiet that Lady Ravensden rallied me upon my silence once or twice; she herself chatted away famously, and expressed her disgust at the dullness of life at Ashwoods, in no measured terms.

"If you're not moped to death here, I know *I* am," she said. "I can't think what possesses Madam that she doesn't ask somebody to the house."

"Her ladyship says," I remarked, "that the people are all 'frumps' about here, and I suppose she does not want to have them."

"But I do, 'frumps' or not, they would be better than nothing at all ; if they *are* heavy, I'll undertake to lighten them, and if they're stupid, *I'll* try and sow a few ideas in their untilled brains ; poor things, and if they make themselves ridiculous, no matter, indeed so much the better, and more amusing. I shouldn't mind if they came dressed as savages, flourishing tomahawks instead of fans, or in theatrical costume as kings and queens, or as imps, or nymphs, so much the merrier, 'fun for ever,' I say," and she laughed so cheerfully, that she infected me with her mirth, and I almost forgot that Mr. Grey might have accompanied us, without making any very great sacrifice either.

On our return from driving, we found the Countess and Mr. Grey enjoying a quiet *tête-à-tête* in the drawing-room.

In the absence of the lively captain, her ladyship seemed quite inclined to find pleasure in Mr. Grey's attentions, and there was an air of coquetry in her manner, which struck me as very much out of place in a married woman.

"Well!" she said, "are you shaken to

pieces? I can't drive out in such villanous roads as those about here are, up and down hill eternally, and jolt, jolt, over the level. I'm too delicate for such rude, barbarous exercise, my frame would crumble to bits like a biscuit, if exposed to such uncivilized discomforts. This is how it is I'm such a martyr, Mr. Grey; I can't go out, and there is nobody I can get to come to see me; by the way there are a few specimens of the animals, native to these wilds coming to dinner to-day, so you'll have an opportunity of studying natural history a little."

"That's right," said the dowager, "I'm very glad to hear it, we're all dying of *ennui* and disgust."

"No one would have thought us dying just now, madam, who could have heard us laughing," I cried, turning to my old friend.

"Indeed!" said Mr. Grey, "may I ask the source of your merriment?"

"Men and women," I replied, "an amusing and instructive subject for discussion; we were laughing at the foibles of our fellows, and drawing inferences of a practical nature which the subject suggested."

"Taking a further step in the path of wisdom, Miss Brand, I see," said Mr. Grey.

Ill natured remark !

The addition to our party at dinner that day, consisted of a Mr. and Mrs. Oxenford ; the clergyman of the parish, the Reverend Septimus Twig ; a gentleman named Barley-crop ; and two ladies, aunt, and niece, who were announced as Miss Townsend Tomkins, and Miss Pauline Townsend Tomkins, the latter were the sister and daughter of an old admiral, lately deceased. They had not resided long in the neighbourhood, and occupied a pretty little cottage in the village, very comfortably in the opinion of the elder lady, very uncomfortably in the opinion of the younger one.

I may as well, in imagination, take my seat in the drawing-room, at the time when these various persons were announced, and favour the reader with a description of them as they enter ; their peculiarities were somewhat strongly marked, and a few strokes will suffice to give a sketch of these interesting individuals.

Previous to the announcement of visitors,

however, the usual circle presented a more lively appearance than ordinary.

The countess, it is true, sat with languid indifference, or martyr-like submission in her bed of a chair, but the dowager stood before the fire, looking brimful of pleasurable anticipation, of a somewhat mischievous nature; her eyes sparkled, and she seemed bent on enjoying herself; yet there was something so genial and kind in her nature, that in spite of her love of fun, she was prepared to like everybody who was expected.

Captain Howard between the two ladies was infected with a slight spirit of maliciousness.

"Feeding time is approaching, is it not?" he said, as the time drew near for the arrival of the guests; "we must expect the rush of these wild animals shortly."

The earl and Mr. Grey smiled, but did not seem quite to share the spirit of the others.

The first person announced was Mr. Barleycrop, he came bowing in with his nose almost touching the carpet, rose again quickly, and displayed to our admiring eyes, a figure magnificently arrayed.

Ashwoods was evidently *une petite cour impériale* to him, and he wished to do honour to the important occasion of dining at "the Earl's."

He slid up to the countess, and again performed the feat of bending his body to the ground, without coming in violent contact with it, and laying bare his brains; he then addressed his noble hostess in language courtly and refined.

"I take the liberty of hoping I see your ladyship well," he said, in a tone of deep interest, similar to that assumed by tender-hearted physicians when inquiring the health of a pretty woman, "having condescended to honour us with a *séjour* in our neighbourhood, I earnestly trust the pure unadulterated breezes, a—a—of this very lovely spot, may prove of benefit to your ladyship—of the greatest benefit, if I may be permitted to hope—*permitted* to hope."

Ere this appropriate speech was quite delivered, and her ladyship had said coolly "thank you," Mr. and Mrs. Oxenford had entered.

Oxenford *muri*, was a thick lumpy looking

man, with a slight cast in the eye, which gave a leering expression to his countenance, and shooting out a "how dy'e do, my lady?" as he stretched his arm out at the distance of three yards from the countess, he stumbled forward, overturning a footstool, two chairs, and a lap dog, in his *gauche emprossement*.

His wife was a little "round about" woman, who entered the room looking exceedingly uncomfortable, and had a very flushed face, and very white gloves I noticed; she had a set smile on her mouth, which smile she kept at the same angle during the whole evening, to express, I suppose, her unqualified delight at everything she saw and heard.

The Misses Townsend Tomkins followed; the senior miss was a ponderous woman, tall, stout, florid, and large "lunged," judging from the volume of voice which rolled forth as she inquired the health of the party. Her niece was a little mean looking concern with great goggle eyes, which immediately upon her entrance, she directed, as if by instinct, on the handsome person of Captain Howard, a compliment which that easy *militaire* bore with modest simplicity of demeanour.

Last on the list, arrived the Reverend Septimus Twig, a piece of ecclesiastical elegance, calculated to impress the beholder; he was of tall person, and handsome countenance, carried a richly scented handkerchief indicative of the odour of sanctity which he would have had us believe pervaded his moral atmosphere, and wore gloves of a delicate shade of grey, symbolical of the sober tone of his thoughts, wishes, and feelings.

There was something very touching in the manner in which this young man paid his *devoirs* to his hostess. The humility of attitude, the tenderness of touch as he took her fair hand, the holy calm throned upon his brow; his fine range of teeth might have recalled to a child's mind the distinguishing feature in the polite friend of little "Goody Two-Shoes;" but Mr. Twig was not a wolf. Oh, no! he was more like a sheep a great deal.

"Mr. Twig, how d'ye do?" shouted the lady with the lungs. "I thought I saw you to-day as I came out of Martha Bell's, you were on the other side of the way; but though I called after you at the top of my voice,

and got stuck in the mud in trying to overtake you, I couldn't get within hail; that poor thing's very ill, and I don't think you've been to see her to-day, Mr. Twig."

The young parson looked annoyed, as he said that he had, "and I hope," he proceeded to say, "that I administered a word in season to our poor suffering sister. She is in a beautiful frame of mind, quite ready to be called to glory."

Mr. and Mrs. Oxenford sat mute, too honoured to think—much less to speak, but the "smile was unaltered" on the face of the lady.

Lord Ravensden walked across the room to Mr. Oxenford, and commenced talking of his day's sport. "The birds were shy," he remarked, "and by the way Mr. Twig," he said, turning to the latter. "Why don't you join us sometimes in a pop at the birds? I am sure it would be a pleasing relaxation after your cottage duties."

Mr. Twig smiled a heavenly smile, and looked suddenly etherealized.

"Are you addressing *me*, my lord?"

"Yes, to be sure, I don't know why you

are to be deprived of the innocent pleasure of shooting, or hunting either, simply because you're in the church. I can't see that there is anything irreligious in it."

The Reverend Mr. Twig answered slowly, mouthing and mincing his words alternately.

"No, perhaps not—indeed of course not. I used to enjoy the shooting season extremely, and was considered a tolerably good shot; but since I have buckled on the heavenly armour, the only sport I consider myself authorized in, is chasing the wolf from the fold—Satan from the congregation of my people—a chase—ah!—of which you little know the difficulties!"

Meanwhile the Dowager Lady Ravensden had attracted Mr. Barleycrop to her side, and that individual was showering upon her ladyship a torrent of language, in a most engaging manner.

"What a charming creature your noble daughter-in-law is, my dear Madam!" he exclaimed with fervour. "How elegantly she reclines in that superb chair—superb chair; charming creature to be sure, and that young lady with the classical head, and that magnificent face, so dark, so interesting, by Heaven!"

my dear Madam, I must know who she is. Brand? is that her name—yes, yes, yes, yes to be sure, splendid creature, quite a treat to see such a contour of face, sets one dreaming, now doesn't it? doesn't it? 'pon my life it reminds me of other times, 'boyhood's days,' and all that sort of thing you know—wakens recollections, and so forth."

"I should think now," he exclaimed in subdued accents, after a pause, in which he had been contemplating the dowager's face, with his head first on one side, and then on the other. "I should think now, that your beautiful young friend must exactly resemble, what your ladyship was, when budding like her into beauty, now, now, isn't it so?—yes, yes, to be sure—to be sure, no deceiving me."

When dinner was announced, I found this worthy allotted to me, much to my annoyance, and the delicate attentions he paid me even in the short passage from the drawing-room to the room where dinner was served, were almost overwhelming.

"To think, now, that Miss Brand—the celebrated Miss Brand was in the neighbourhood, and for me not to be aware of a fact so inte-

resting! I ought to have become conscious of it by some mysterious agency—really I ought, I ought. Ah! you shiver? a draught from the door, and you're exposed to it—dear me, dear me.”

“I'm a ‘child of the warm South,’ ” I said, “and in the exposed situation in which this house stands, I feel the cold very much.”

“And you really are a ‘child of the warm South?’ bless me, now, how very interesting that is! It reminds me of Shakspeare, you know it of course, ‘breathing on a bank of violets,’ sweet idea to be sure, sweet idea! No doubt your beautiful mind abounds in exquisite fancies, thoughts glowing as tropical skies, and so forth. Now do you know that the knowledge of the fact of which you have just kindly informed me, enhances the interest with which your charms have inspired me, in a tenfold degree? It does upon my life, I've a passion for warmth myself, and the south—”

“Hock, Sir?” asked a servant.

“Thank you; now, now, *didn't* that remind you of the sunny Rhine, Moselle, and all those enchanting regions? There's such power in association; that magical word carried me, I

assure you, far away into other lands, and brought recollections of my bachelor ramblings there; delightful they were to be sure, *to* be sure, most delightful."

"Is it long," I asked (for the sake of saying something), "since you were there?"

"Some few years, I was a mere boy then." I thought in that case, it must have been many years instead of few. "It was there I met with the excellent, and really extremely pretty person, I had afterwards the honour and pleasure of making Mrs. B. You, with your fine taste, Miss Brand, would have admired her, poor Mrs. B!" and he sighed, took a custard, and went on. "It is very hard to have a sensitive heart, and gushing affections, and no one on whom to pour the floodtide of your feelings; but *you* never could have felt that." My other neighbour addressed me at this moment, which was a relief. Mr. Barleycrop was becoming personal. This other neighbour was the Reverend Septimus Twig.

"You are a stranger here, I presume, Miss Brand?"

I answered, "quite so."

"Ah!" and he looked sagacious, "and may

I ask what you think of the neighbourhood?"

"It appears to be rather sterile in parts," I replied, "but the bold outline of the country pleases me, there is an openness and freshness about the scenery which is very charming."

"I suppose you don't know much of our good neighbours in these parts?" he said half interrogatively.

"No, this is the only opportunity I have had of seeing any of them."

"You will not care to have another, if I judge you rightly," he remarked, "such *cannaille!*" I was somewhat surprised at hearing him express himself thus, but only smiled, and encouraged, I suppose, by my seeming concurrence with his opinion, he continued.

"It is a strange life for a man like me to lead, but I'm contented to exist here for a time."

"You would not wish to remain here then?"

"Remain *here*, my dear Miss Brand! how can you imagine that a man still young would sacrifice himself in such cruel fashion? for what end? The duty here, requires neither talent, energy, nor anything else; no, no, between ourselves a little rural affair like this, is

merely a stepping-stone to something better—I mean to a more enlarged sphere of usefulness, which, longing for, as I do, is only right; when such presents itself, I shall consider it my duty, to embrace it at any sacrifice.”

“What is that, Mr. Twig?” called out Miss Townsend Tomkins at the top of her voice.

“I was merely saying, my dear Madam, that if, as is very probable, I should have a call to more extended duties, I shall consider myself bound to embrace that call.”

“And leave us? that’s not handsome, Mr. Twig, I thought you said you should like that little living in my brother Sir John’s gift; and I promised you my interest in the matter.”

“You are very kind, I’m sure, very good—nothing could be kinder; but I’ve an objection to pluralities, I object to them for several reasons, and should I get the nomination, which I am now expecting, to a living in the North, I fear I must decline your proffered recommendation.”

“You don’t say so,” cried Miss Tomkins, astonished at the beautiful disinterestedness of the young clergyman, “you surprise me—ex-

pecting another living? why, I'd made up my mind that you should have that living of my brother's, and you must, too; I know he'll give it to you if I press the matter again, and I'm determined to do it the very first opportunity."

The Reverend Septimus Twig looked resigned to the honour which was thus to be "thrust" upon him, and I fancied I perceived a little playful twitching about the corners of the mouth, which gave me a slight insight into the *jeu*, and the suspicion that the "living in the North" was a myth.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ Though mean and mighty, rotting
Together have one dust: yet reverence
(That angel of the world) doth make distinction
Of place 'tween high and low. ”

CYMBELINE.

WHEN the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room, the countess seemed to have conceived a sudden feeling of confidential leaning towards me.

“ Well, my dear,” she said in a low tone, “ what do you think of this? don’t you call this martyrdom? I do. Pray help me, like a good soul, and do the talking for me, I’m really unable to exert myself to the required extent—I must be spared this in future, I’ll take care not to have such an infliction again.”

“ What subscription’s that you’re talking

about?" cried the quick-eared Miss Tomkins, "don't spend all your money, ladies, if you please, till I make *my* claims known—I've a sad case for your ladyship's consideration."

"Spare me!" said the young Countess imploringly, "you've so many cases, Miss Tomkins, it is quite impossible I can relieve all, and my nerves not being strong, these dreadful cases of distress are very harrowing to hear about, and affect me very painfully; I'll give them something at Christmas."

"But they'll starve before then, something must be done at once," continued the pertinacious Miss Tomkins, "and the rich people in the parish are those who should do it—Mrs. Oxenford, may I hope for your co-operation?"

Mrs. Oxenford thus addressed, looked very uncomfortable; she was at all times an uncomfortable looking person, and her present perturbation was caused by two opposing wishes—the one of appearing grand in "the parish" by relieving its distresses, the other of currying favour with the countess by chiming in with all her ladyship's views; after reddening therefore, and smiling a great deal, she said:

"But why should we trouble Lady

Ravensden with these matters? tell me whose case you allude to, and I—”

“Oh! if you’ll attend to it, I should be glad—it’s the Sheppards’.”

“Miss Tomkins, I’m shocked,” cried Mrs. Oxenford, “how can you mention the name of that dreadful girl in ‘ears polite;’ if that is your case, I could not, on principle, have anything to do with it.”

“And why not?” asked Miss Tomkins.

“You mustn’t ask me,” said the lady, “it’s best not to talk of these things.”

“What things?” cried the dowager. “What forbidden subject is that you’re getting upon?”

The old lady was informed by Miss Tomkins of the circumstances of the case, and she immediately laid down some money for the unhappy object of charity, expressing at the same time much commiseration, and kind sympathy.

The thought struck me as she did so, “how much the world may be deceived by appearances.” Any one would have imagined, looking at externals, that the quiet, simpering little woman, apparently the essence of amia-

bility, would have been the first person to have her feelings touched by any tale of sorrow; whilst the gay, lively old lady, who rattled away on all subjects, so fearlessly, and in such an off-hand manner, would have been considered proof against all weakness of the sort; but we have seen that it was not so.

The heroine of the everlasting grimace presently came and seated herself near me.

"I do so want to talk to you, Miss Brand," she said. I bowed.

"It is so delightful to see a fashionable person here—quite an advantage," she cried, the toady! "and what a dear old lady Lord Ravensden's mamma seems!"

"She is," I replied.

"And what a treat it is to see such handsome gentlemen as there are here to night—really beautiful men!"

"They are good looking," I said, "but in London one sees so many fine specimens of the sex, that the party assembled here to-night does not strike me as anything remarkable."

"Does it not? Not that military man? and our own Mr. Septimus Twig—don't you

think him divine? Those lovely blue eyes—
don't you admire them?"

"Ah!" I cried.

"I love those simple beauties
With eyes of modest blue,
Whose joys are in their *duties*
Affectionate and true.

Change the sex referred to from the feminine to the masculine, and the song suits the present subject, or rather your views of it, Mrs. Oxenford."

That lady looked suddenly very uncomfortable.

"I didn't say *loved*, Miss Brand."

I laughed.

" 'Loving,' stands for 'liking,' I take it; but *revenons à nos moutons*, this shepherd—you do not surely compare him with Captain Howard?"

"O! no. I was just going to say, I never saw any one so beautiful as Captain Howard; he must be like that lovely statue at Florence—don't they call it the Apollo Belvidere, such a sweet name isn't it?"

I said I thought so too, adding somewhat inadvertently, that apart from his good looks

the gentleman we were alluding to, was in every way worthy of admiration, for the many noble qualities both of mind and heart, which he possessed. Mrs. Oxenford informed the village the very next day, that Miss Brand was desperately in love with that "duck of an officer," and had made a confidante of her, respecting the state of her feelings. To that young lady herself, however, she made no sign that she considered herself so honoured, but appeared wholly absorbed by another subject.

"I hope, Miss Brand," she simpered, "you'll excuse my looking at you as I do, but it really is quite impossible to help it," and she sat staring fixedly at my countenance.

I assured her she was perfectly welcome to look as much as she liked, that it did not discompose me in the least, that I was extremely flattered, &c.

The entrance of the gentlemen, I experienced as a great relief, nor was it the first time that under similar circumstances, the appearance of the lords of the creation had been hailed with satisfaction : they exercise as beneficial an effect on female society, as a modest woman does on an assemblage of the opposite

sex, and a decidedly improved tone of conversation is the consequence.

A petticoat coterie is of all things most odious. The rein is given to scandal ; there is a " littleness " in the topics under discussion, and also in the way in which they are discussed, which is contemptible ; and I have often wondered at the transformation which suddenly takes place, on the entrance of men into a circle of women. Both their manners and their minds appear elevated by coming in contact with their " head"—their " master"—man ; and charms are brought into exercise for his enthrallment, which would have been thrown away upon individuals of their own sex.

It is not so, however, in all cases ; many women possess as great a power of fascination over their female friends, as they do over their male acquaintances. Leila, my bright, beautiful Leila was one of these ; she was as charming when we were alone, only she and I together, as when surrounded by a bevy of admirers ; and I used to think the secret of this difference between her and other women, lay in her being so perfectly natural—her

grace came instinctively, and she neither required nor practised any arts to make herself agreeable.

When the gentlemen entered the room, I thought Mr. Grey seemed on the point of advancing towards me ; I was sitting opposite the door, and it was but a few steps for him ; if, however, he had any intention of doing so, it was not carried into effect, the gorgeous person of Mr. Barleycrop was in a moment standing before me in all the glory of velvet waistcoat, massive gold chain, polished boots, and perfumed handkerchief.

“ Ah—a—how very delightful to rejoin you once more ! ’pon my word, my dear Miss Brand, I can almost say, I have not existed since we parted. I really don’t know how it is with other men, but ’pon my life when the ladies leave us after dinner—barbarous custom—night seems to have spread its mantle over my soul. Yes, night shadows my soul. Yes, yes, yes, yes, to be sure. I assure you,” he went on, “ I can only exist in the atmosphere hallowed by the angelic presence of woman—lovely woman, as the the poet says—lovely, lovely women ! ”

To change the subject, I asked Mr. Barleycrop if he had seen the contents of a certain portfolio lying on the table : it was a collection of water-colour drawings of great beauty,

"You'd like to see them?" he asked with *empressement*, rising at the same moment, and stretching a hand towards the precious book.

"I am familiar with its contents," I said, "but I should like to show them to you, as from your manner of discussing art, I imagined you are a connoisseur."

"How considerate now! how very kind!"

Then we drew out delicious sunny bits of Pyne's, and breezy down scenes of Copley Fielding's, and charming specimens of green nature by Cox and De Wint, these were Lord Ravensden's favorites. Then came Prout with his old cathedrals, and his picturesque towers and balconies overhanging some pellucid river.

"Here Mr. Barleycrop," I exclaimed, "if champagne has the power of wafting you to the sunny banks of Rhine or Moselle, what will this do?"

"Divine, divine!" he exclaimed with a rapturous sigh. Cattermoles followed, with

their thrilling story expressed in a few dashing strokes ; a romantic German spirit seemed to pervade some, whilst others, told a tale of our own land in brighter hues, and with tenderer touches ; but all were beautiful.

On each drawing, Mr. Barleycrop made some remark with exquisite delicacy of sentiment therein conveyed ; each lady represented, bore a resemblance to Mrs. B—, and a little buxom German maiden, with eyes like glass beads, and hair like tow, he declared bore a resemblance to me, because I admired her simplicity and freshness.

Attracted by the display of drawings, Captain Howard at length drew near ; Lord Ravensden also ; and as a pretty woodland scene presented itself, his lordship turning to Mr. Barleycrop said :

“ You know that, of course ? ”

“ To be sure, to be sure. The Dingle.”

It was a sketch by a first-rate artist of a part of Mr. Barleycrop's grounds, and it represented a rocky scene, with glassy water mirroring dark trees which rose amongst heavy boulders of rock, and a winding path showing here and there amongst the rich foliage.

"What a charming scene for a pic-nic!" exclaimed Captain Howard who came up at the moment we were contemplating it.

"Yes, and it has witnessed many," said the Earl; "thanks to Mr. Barleycrop's good nature, the neighbouring people make it quite a scene of festivity."

"Dear me!" cried the dowager, "and what have we been thinking about? why don't we get up a pic-nic? it would be a change of a pleasing nature. Come, who's for it?"

"Is it not late for a pic-nic?" asked Miss Tomkins.

"It is late," said Lord Ravensden, "but the season is so remarkably fine, and there having been no frosts yet, I think we might venture, if Mr. Barleycrop—"

"My dear lord, nothing would afford me more pleasure, more unqualified delight, than placing my grounds, my house, myself, my unworthy self, at your disposal, use me as you will, anything my little place affords is at your lordship's service, quite at your service; and if your charming friends here," bowing to the ladies, "will honour me by partaking of a little cold collation, a little champagne, and so

forth, it will make me supremely happy—supremely happy.”

“No, no!” exclaimed Lord Ravensden, “we didn’t mean to invite ourselves in that fashion, too cool a proceeding that would be; a pic-nic’s a pic-nic you know, and if you’ll agree to our terms, and provide us with a pleasant locale for our entertainment, the rest must be our affair,” and after the polite contention usual on such occasions, the matter was decided to the satisfaction of all parties, Miss Pauline Tomkins especially, who clasped her hands together in an excess of joy, and bestowed upon me a little playful squeeze.

These arrangements concluded, there was a call for music, and our hostess being conducted to the pianoforte, executed a brilliant fantasia in a truly artistic manner; Captain Howard was then called upon, and he gave us the fine old song, “The Admiral,” in a voice manly and musical, and with great feeling.

Presently Miss Tomkins was requested “to favour us.” This lady had been talking so much about music during dinner, that I set her down as an enthusiast of no ordinary description; she asked each person separately, if he

or she had "a soul for music," and appeared deeply interested in the reply. When she addressed the question to me, I replied, "I am very fond of music."

"Fond!" she said, "yes, but have you a soul for it? many people like it who have no soul; soul is everything in music. I wouldn't give a fig to hear a bar, which didn't contain 'soul.'"

After this, I thought she must be a veritable Psyche, and wondered she did not adorn herself with butterflies, as being emblematical of that mystery.

I awaited with much interest her psychological performance.

She sat down to the instrument, made herself comfortable with a great fuss, and striking a few chords which almost shook the room, struck up the "Gloria in excelsis;" my previous suspicions of the volume of voice contained in her huge frame, were then confirmed.

It was a *glorious* theme for her, and she revelled in it, thundering away in G. major, like a female Jove; occasionally she was out of tune, it is true, but what of that? our souls *are* out of tune sometimes, and possibly hers

was at the moment ; but she went through it manfully, (not womanfully) with a vigour, a determination and a strength of character perfectly astonishing, it made you suspend your breath, while this harmonious tempest was going on, lest you should be involved in some terrible catastrophe, and the effect was certainly very striking and grand—very grand indeed.

I only felt thankful I was not on board ship when the tempest of sound reached my ears, I should have been very—*very* ill, I am sure.

And what was Mr. Grey doing all this time? For a little while he stood by the young Countess' chair, answering a variety of questions, which in a particular pleasing tone she was putting to him ; I don't know why, but if anything I disliked her manner towards him more than I disliked the pert, yet pretty way the Lady Lucy had of addressing him.

By and bye, I saw the dowager advance and enlist him for a rubber, the other players being Mr. and Mrs. Oxenford ; and retiring to a corner of the room where the card-tables were laid, they were all soon engrossed by the game. It seemed to me very strange that he had not found one spare moment to devote to me, it

was not thus at D'Arville, nor in the little back drawing-room in Hertford Street; no, it was all changed now, but why—puzzled me, and shook my confidence in man exceedingly.

Only a few words had passed between us since his arrival, yet he did not seek me that evening; and but for an occasional glance which I encountered, I should have been inclined to fancy he had forgotten my existence, he, of whom I had thought and dreamed so much!

Mr. Barleycrop, however, was most persevering in his endeavours to please, and to rid myself in some measure of his tiresome attentions, I turned towards Captain Howard, whom I had introduced to Miss Pauline Townsend Tomkins, thinking she would be gratified at being able to address with her lips the man to whom she had been talking so eloquently with her eyes. With his usual good-nature, he was entertaining his companion with a lively story, connected with the time when his regiment was quartered in Ireland; he imitated Paddy's brogue to perfection, and Miss Pauline, without, I believe, understanding much of what he was talking about, appeared in a state

of ecstatic joy, at the idea of being addressed by the handsome officer.

Another, and another story followed, till it was time for the Townsend Tomkins' to return home, when the Reverend Septimus Twig offered to see the ladies safely domiciled.

Mr. and Mrs. Oxenford thought it but proper that they should leave at the same time, and Mr. Barleycrop wound up the evening with a flourish of compliments to each lady present. "Good night, good night!" he murmured, as he gently pressed my hand. "I've something to look forward to, have I not?—yes, yes, to be sure—to be sure, the ecstasy of finding myself in your charming society again very soon I hope—very soon—*very* soon; good night!" and he likewise took his departure.

"I hope you've had enough of our neighbours, now;" exclaimed Lady Ravensden, the younger, to her husband, as soon as the last guest had left.

"Well, my dear," he said, "I don't know, I see nothing so very objectionable in them; I'll grant you that their company every evening would not be the most agreeable you

could have, but now and then, I think with my mother, that it's rather amusing; and if we afford them a gratification, which we really appear to do, I think it only right to put ourselves out of the way a little, to fulfil the courtesies of neighbourhood; it only happens occasionally, and it's odd indeed if we can't lay aside our grandeur, and enter into the feelings of those who are less favoured by fortune than ourselves."

"Good natured ninny!" I heard the countess exclaim *sotto voce*, continuing in a louder tone. "The infliction of the company of that monster, that she-bull, Miss—what is her barbarous name? — Tomkins? I shall not recover from it for a century—it was too dreadful," and the lady give an icy shiver.

"She is a rare tulip!" cried Captain Howard, "and would suit the Yankees, famously—a regular go-ahead, who'd fire at anybody or anything in 'tarnation lively' style; I dare say she read your ladyship a pretty little lecture on parochial duty in the drawing-room, after dinner—she attacked me, the 'she-bull'—capital, ha, ha! and I thought I should have been tossed up sky-high.

yes—I pronounce that female a very rare tulip.”

“No matter,” said the earl, “she’s a good woman, I believe, and endeavours, though in a rough way, to do her duty—and sincerity, I always respect.”

I thought his lordship was right, and only regretted that extreme coarseness of manner should accompany, and spoil so much that was praiseworthy.

“Who is that mountebank—old Barley-crop?” asked Mr. Grey, with a somewhat contemptuous tone.

“Ha, ha!” laughed Lord Ravensden, “he’s a fine old bird, is he not? It’s quite pleasant to see a man on such excellent terms with himself as he is; he was a merchant originally, I believe, and either made, or dropped in for a good fortune, which he enjoys exceedingly down at his little place here, where he plays the *grand prince* but feels rather small in town. I endeavoured to give the poor fellow a lift by introducing him at my club, but somehow or other, he wouldn’t ‘go down’ among the men there.”

“I should think not, indeed!” cried the

countess, "what insane fancy will you take in your head next, George? What must the people have thought of your introducing a bedizened old donkey like that, as your friend?"

"No matter what they thought," was the quiet answer; "occupying a tolerably respectable position myself, I can afford to do a civil act, without being afraid of lowering myself in the estimation of any one, or entertaining any servile fear of giving offence to this person or that; and so that my conscience offers a clean bill of health, I'm easy on the subject of other people's opinions on such matters—believe me, I'm above all that nonsense, my dear."

His lady sneered, but did not by the act make herself look at all more aristocratic than her good-natured husband with his pleasant smile; he continued, after a pause,

"Now that conceited young parson was the least to my taste of the whole party."

"Because the most gentlemanlike?" asked the young countess, sarcastically.

"No, I didn't think he was the most gentlemanlike; he apes a good deal, and his fine person, and good education assist him in

producing a certain effect, but I doubt if the mind of the man is at all superior to Mr. Barleycrop's."

"Not equal to it," cried the dowager, "for Barley's all open and above board, but that blackbeetle's a sneak, a crawling toady, I'm sure; I can see it, and that demeans him in my eyes far more than the blazing waiscoats and glittering chains of our flourishing friend lower *him*. Vanity is the mainspring in both cases, but in one it is innocent in its effects, in the other, the results are dangerous sometimes."

"There is something wrong in our ecclesiastical system," remarked Mr. Grey, "in permitting as it does, the sacred offices to be held by men who are unqualified or incompetent, either mentally or morally, for their duties. Can you imagine the first founders of our establishment, or any of the numerous divines, who in all ages have graced it, approving of such a piece of scented affectation and conceit as that young Reverend? I can only fancy weak-minded girls, and doating old ladies being influenced by him; men, do not so readily yield to the empty pretence of these actors."

"But that couple of oxen," exclaimed the old lady, "what lumpy creatures they are! can't they be goaded on to perform the journey of life a little faster?"

"The pace suits them very well, mother, why should it be quickened?" said Lord Ravensden, "they're very happy in their way, and at home with their children, I assure you, they appear to greater advantage than they do here: every one is not calculated like my lady mother" (and he kissed her as he spoke), "to shine in society."

"The fact is, my dear," said she, "I'm gregarious—*vide* Johnson—'going in flocks or herds,' that's my fancy, and loneliness is distasteful and unnatural to me, you are differently constituted; and you're a jewel my boy!" said the mother with parental pride, "but you want polishing."

"Can't take the polish—no use to try," was the son's answer, "people must take me as they find me."

CHAPTER XV.

"Heaven's airs amid the harp-strings dwell;
And we wish they ne'er may fade;
They cease;—and the soul is a silent cell,
Where music never played."

WILSON.

SUNDAY morning —how well I remember that first Sunday morning of Mr. Grey's visit! I can fancy myself standing at the breakfast-room window looking out into the garden.

The freshness of autumn was in the air, the dahlias drooped their heavy heads with eyes full of tears, and the pendent bells of the crimson fuschia each contained a pearly drop; there was a softness, a sweet calm pervading everything, and just sun enough to burnish the gilded train of a lordly peacock, which, with its family, awaited patiently the daily donation of

crumbs, received at the hands of their kind master.

The servants, as usual on the sabbath, were late, and more than one peck at the window, announced the fact that the feathery pensioners were hungry ; seeing which, I ventured to feed them myself, and while so occupied, the gentlemen came along the gravel walk. I observed with pleasure that Mr. Grey's cheek was regaining the hue of health, and freshened up by the morning air, he looked better than I had ever seen him.

He was conversing with Lord Ravensden on his favourite topic ; namely, the condition of the people ; and was making inquiries respecting the state of the neighbouring poor, which led his lordship to allude to the way affairs were going on on his Irish estates, a matter fraught with perplexity and disappointment. The gentlemen were so much interested in the subject, that I found it necessary to inform them of my vicinity, and of the fact that breakfast had been ready some time ; on which information, they stepped in at the open window, and expressed themselves quite ready to partake of the welcome repast.

Neither of the other ladies having risen, it fell to my share to do the honours of the table, and while the trio talked on, I listened, and not without profit, to their conversation.

I had never heard so much before, and consequently had not thought of the duties of landlord and tenant; both sides of the question were discussed in a very proper spirit, but it ended where it began, after circling a variety of opinions, and I thought the discussion had a very unsatisfactory conclusion, so will not detail it here.

Presently the silvery tones of the village bells, ascended from the valley, calling us to prayer—inviting us to present ourselves at a holy shrine, to plead for blessings that we needed—for light in our darkness—for guidance on our way.

It was getting late before I was ready to go, and then I found myself hurrying down the hill on the arm of Mr. Grey. I hardly know how it so happened, but I think Lord Ravensden stayed to accompany his mother, and Captain Howard, who had started after us, was accidentally encountered by Miss Pauline Townsend Tomkins, and had to walk through

the village and into church as escort to that young lady, creating thereby great agitation and envy in the breasts of the Misses Simpkins—rivals of the Tomkinsons, and a joyous thrill in the tender breast of the sensitive Pauline.

Over Mr. Grey and myself as we walked on, there seemed to fall a strange feeling of awkwardness; my manner was very constrained and unnatural I am sure, and I talked at random upon a variety of subjects, in a falsely excited style. He listened quietly, with a bearing graver than his wont, and said very little—merely replying to questions I put to him, or making general remarks upon the village, and the people we met.

I did not like this quietness—it made me quite angry with him—nor the kind way in which he studied my wishes, and agreed to all I said; I thought any other manner would have pleased me better in him, and I almost, indeed quite, longed to quarrel with him—to have a downright good war of words and feelings, and thus give play to the tempest which was disturbing the depths of my soul with a heavy “underground swell.”

It was almost a relief to me, to see at an angle of the road, a figure apparently awaiting us. It was attired in a very glossy coat, an exceedingly smooth hat, highly polished boots, and gloves of extreme delicacy of tint.

It made a start as if—(which we had not) we had taken it by surprise.

“Now—now, ’pon my soul—who’d have thought it?” it exclaimed, “what a singular stroke of fortune to be sure, that I should happen—should just chance you know—to meet Miss Brand here!—most singular to be sure. Good morning!” bowing to Mr. Grey, then turning to me again. “Going to church now I dare say? of course, of course—charming really such piety—quite beautiful—I feel—”

“Rebuked!” I ventured to suggest.

“Just so—just so, how kind now of you to supply the word I couldn’t find. I don’t know what’s come to me within the last few days,” and he sighed profoundly.

I happened at this moment to catch a glimpse of Mr. Grey’s face, and perceived that he was looking very much irritated and annoyed; far more so than was justifiable under the circumstances.

"The path, Sir, is too narrow I fear, for three people to walk abreast," he said, rather shortly.

"To be sure, yes—yes, if you will go on with your charming companion, I will walk behind, "I'll follow wheresoe'er ye lead—ye canna lead to ill !' you know that sweet little song I dare say, Miss Brand ? and I feel quite sure you couldn't lead one to ill," and following close at my heels, he kept up a running fire of remarks till we reached the church door.

Once or twice Mr. Grey seemed on the point of stopping, and saying something to Mr. Barleycrop, but to my great relief he contented himself with looking round very darkly occasionally ; quickening our pace, and—but I need not mention it—breathing out a naughty little word, which will escape the best regulated lips sometimes.

Arrived at the door of the great square pew in which Lord Ravensden's family performed their devotions, it was with something of an authoritative air Mr. Grey handed me in, and placed a hassock for my feet, then seating himself in a corner took a survey of the little church.

How pretty it was by the way ! but it was in a different style to the church at D'Arville ; this was what they call "restored," and though an ancient structure, everything about it had an air of newness which was very unromantic ; still, it possessed a beauty of its own, in the lightness of the pointed gothic—the clean-cut pillars—the lancet windows, and the airy, lace-like screen.

On our entrance, a sensation seemed created, as the whole of the poorer part of the congregation rose and curtseyed ; a remnant of feudalism, which I thought might have been dispensed with, and the better class, better at least so far as was indicated by broad-cloth instead of smock-frocks, and bonnets of pretension, instead of antidiluvian pokes, indulged in a decided stare.

As the service proceeded, I fear my thoughts wandered sadly, they were ever going back to D'Arville, to that gloomy, but very beautiful chamber, whence we looked out upon the ancient tombs, and tattered silken banners, and grey twilight. I thought of the day I went there sketching ; my companion there, was before me now, was he changed to me ?

At times I could not think it possible, but at others something like a cold dark shade crept over my heart, and I assured myself that I had been dreaming.

I endeavoured to think of the past, as indeed gone for ever—gone beyond recall; the idol set up in my heart became spirit-like, intangible; the repulsive form of my guardian rose threateningly before me, and a long array of years, cheerless, wretched, stretched far away into the gloomy future.

Once a tear dropped on my open book, I think, and the little crystal world pointed to a passage which recalled me to myself whilst it awoke reflection.

“For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?”

Mr. Twig’s sermon was a flowery effusion, delivered with a good deal of mouthing, and made no impression save of the preacher’s conceit, except perhaps in the gentle bosoms of a few young ladies who thought more of the man than of his mind, no uncommon case.

Many others there besides myself, would no doubt have preferred to hear a discourse

of less pretension, and to more practical purpose.

When simple information on any doctrinal point is all we require, or a dissertation on Church History, or ecclesiastical polity is necessary, a man fresh from the schools can afford it as readily as any other; but when a weight is at your heart, be it of sin or suffering, and you feel dissatisfied with yourself, and with the world, then you pant for something more, and the experience of one who has himself known temptation, sorrow, and disappointment, and can direct you to that physician who mercifully healed *his* wounds, and poured the balm of peace o'er his spirit, is worth all the rhetoric, the learning, and fascinating gracefulness of studied pulpit eloquence.

Mr. Grey expressed his opinion in strong terms upon the matter, on leaving church.

"I wonder," he said, "how people can tolerate such asinine attempts at oratory, but if our establishment were placed on a better footing, our pulpits would be more worthily occupied."

CHAPTER XVI.

“ O, he’s as tedious
As is a tired horse, a railing wife ;
Worse than a smoky house :—I had rather live
With cheese and garlic, in a windmill, far,
Than feed on cates, and have him talk to me,
In any summer-house in Christendom.”

HENRY IV. *First Part.*

MR. BARLEYCROP’S pic-nic, as we called it, came off in a few days ; besides the party who had previously met at Ashwoods, were several families from the neighbourhood. Amongst these was a gentleman tall and angular, with daughters to match ; a German professor who was staying with them ; and an old half-pay major, a visitor of Mr. Barleycrop’s. I forget the rest, but these were some of the additions.

It was certainly too late for a pic-nic, and

in that sense, the whole affair was a failure, not worth recording here ; but one or two incidents of a somewhat amusing nature which occurred, should be noticed.

“The Dingle” was an extremely pretty, though melancholy place ; at any time it was dark and shadowy, but at that sombre season when the “sere and yellow leaf,” was falling to earth in very weariness—tired of life—there was something particularly triste about it.

Two rather steep acclivities rose on either side of a sullen, almost stagnant stream, which reflected the shade of overhanging trees. These trees grew where they could, yet contrived to form dense masses of foliage here and there, whilst in some places, the grey rock peeped through, and raised itself to a considerable elevation, showing a summit crowned with feathery shrubs, or a few specimens of young trees, as if to show what it could do.

On the face of the slope were formed winding paths, and very greasy and slippery they were ; dangerous too in some places, where treacherous roots had silently wound their way across them.

Almost on the summit of the little hill on one side, a rustic building had been erected for the accommodation of festive parties, permitted to "pic-nic" at the Dingle. It was built of bark and thatch, and a variety of odd materials, and had a suffocative sort of smell; the light stole into the mysterious recesses of this primitive structure through tiny windows of stained glass, which cast a cadaverous shade over the guests, but it afforded ample room for a large gathering, and from the noise and hubbub made when we were assembled therein, it would be inferred that the air of gloom hanging over it was not depressing to the spirits; the thing altogether was admirably adapted for an affair of the kind.

Mr. Barleycrop was in his glory, no expense had been spared in his "getting up" for the occasion, and he fluttered about hither and thither like a busy bantem.

"What a happy moment!" he cried, as he welcomed me, "to condescend, the beautiful Miss Brand to condescend to honour my humble grounds with her presence, and Miss Brand's friends too—the proudest day of my life—really, really."

"Are we all assembled?" asked Captain Howard.

"No, the Oxenfords are not come yet, they are to bring a friend who has just arrived on a visit, a young lady I believe."

At this moment, the couple alluded to, accompanied by "five of their children," (they had a quiver full), arrived, and Mr. Barleycrop advanced with some eagerness to receive them, and the strange young lady, their friend.

"Is it possible?" I exclaimed to myself, "is that really Miss?" yes, another look, and I was convinced that it was, "Miss Rice, of Compton memory!"

She was attired in a dress of pea-green silk, with a mantilla of crimson velvet, over which hung a massive chain, the fellow to Mr. Barleycrop's, her bonnet was of gold colour, filled with grapes, and adorned also on the outside with luscious looking clusters of the same fruit, her parasol was pink.

"Miss Brand!" she cried on perceiving me, "my dear, is it really you? how unexpected—how delightful! how do you do?"

She seemed to waft over me airs from

Compton, and in spite of her oddity, I was really very glad to see her.

"What lovely grounds!" she exclaimed as soon as she had asked me a few questions respecting myself. "Do they all belong to Mr. Barleycrop, do you know, my dear? charming man to have such a sweet place! but he looks like a person of great taste, for how beautifully he is dressed," and she smiled at him in such a fascinating manner, with her head on one side, that he was obliged in gratitude for her kind notice to approach her.

"What a capital match," I thought, they looked like a couple of paroquets making love, and the sight was interesting, to say the least of it.

"I must get you, my dear Sir," she said in a winning sort of way, "to take me over your beautiful domain, such a sylvan sweet place it seems to be." The gentleman, I fancy was a trifle disappointed at finding the "young lady" he expected, of such mature age, but he politely answered.

"With pleasure—the greatest pleasure—and Miss Brand," turning to me, "will you

permit me the honour of escorting you at the same time?"

Mr. Grey was advancing for a similar purpose apparently, but I could not well refuse mine host's request, and accepting the support of his arm, I saw Mr. Grey turn away, and offer his services to one of the tall, angular girls.

"And this is really all your own property, Sir," said Miss Rice, addressing our gay cavalier.

"All my own, ma'am," was the complacent answer; "an humble little property, but sufficient for my modest requirements as a lone man—a miserable lone man!"

Miss Rice looked tender and sympathetic.

"You feel as I do, I see, Mr. Barleycrop."

"And how is that may I ask? Shall I be deemed impertinent if I inquire in what our feelings agree? Impertinent?"

"O, no!" she replied softly, "you could not be impertinent, I'm sure. We sympathize in this way—I have often felt in my own home, comfortable—indeed luxurious as it is said to be, how sad it is to be alone—to have none to share it with me."

“Like ‘the rose in the garden left blooming alone!’ I see, I see—yes, yes, to be sure, quite touching. The heart has its little needs, has it not, ma’am?” and I felt my hand pressed against his arm, and concluded that by mistake he had pressed his right arm instead of his left.

“And you’ve a luxurious home, have you ma’am?” was the question put after a few moments’ silence.

“It is considered so,” Miss Rice modestly replied, “but I feel it most desolate.”

“Do you really now! how very strange! how singularly strange that we should both have the same feelings!”

Miss Rice applied her handkerchief to her eyes immediately, whilst Mr. Barleycrop paused, to point out the beauties of the woodland scene.

I admired it extremely.

“Tender, is it not?” he murmured. “Yes, touched by the artistic hand of nature—these woods speak to my heart: *iris-hued* like my feelings, yet doomed like them to fall to the ground with nothing to cling to, nothing to—love!” another squeeze.

“ Oh ! Mr. Barleycrôp—don’t ! ” exclaimed the sympathetic Miss Rice. “ You don’t know what an effect your words produce in me ; you express yourself so beautifully—it’s like a book.”

“ Do I really though ? ’Pon my life, ma’am, I had no idea any poor words of mine could have so much influence ; forgive me if I have caused one pang to shoot through that virgin breast ! believe me it was unintentionally that I awoke the sweet sensibilities of that pure bosom. Compose yourself, my dear madam, for my sake—my sake. By Jove ! it’s damp here, have you thick boots on ladies ? I am such an anxious creature where ladies are concerned ; such an anxious creature—to be sure.”

A stifled laugh at my elbow made me turn round, and I there encountered the merry laughter-loving eyes of “ Honest Hal.”

“ Do you feel inclined to climb that tempting looking rock, Miss Brand ? ” he asked ; “ they say that it repays those who are at the trouble of ascending it, by the fine view to be obtained from the summit ; if your curiosity lead you to make the attempt, I shall be happy to accompany you.”

Glad to escape from my sentimental companions, I accepted his offer, and leaving the two interesting young people to their love-making, Captain Howard and myself proceeded to ascend by a steep awkward path which led to the spot we wished to gain.

"O!" cried Miss Rice, "do let us go too, I am so fond of skipping about amongst cliffs, fancying myself a goat, or some other dear mountain animal. I was always as fond of it as any pretty young gipsy girl."

Mr. Barleycrop, however, did not share these feelings apparently; he had suffered—so the village doctor had indiscreetly whispered, from a twinge or two of rheumatism, so he looked at his highly polished boots, and then at the little dainty shoes of Miss Rice, and said tenderly.

"Imprudent, I think, do not you? rather imprudent; but I am your slave—Miss Rice's slave—command me."

Prudence won the day.

After scrambling amongst loose stones and bramble bushes for some time, we reached a little platform of rock, whence our range of vision took in a fine prospect of the fair

champaign country, stretching away in the distance; and looking down upon "the Dingle," with its masses of vegetation, the varied autumnal tints giving it an appearance of gorgeous, almost tropical beauty, we confessed that the ascent was worth the trouble.

On this plateau it was tolerably dry, too, so we seated ourselves there on the old stoul of a tree, and while Captain Howard amused himself in trying to procure for me some of the bright scarlet berries of the mountain ash, and the more tempting branches of wild barberry, which hung over our heads, I looked down upon the groups of people who appeared here and there, at a turn of one of the numerous winding paths below us.

I heard the stentorian voice of Miss Tomkins calling on Mr. Twig, to give her his arm, which that amiable person, with profound policy, immediately did.

I saw Miss Pauline looking somewhat perturbed, as the German professor paid her delicate attentions; and the Oxenford couple in a state of great agitation at the discovery that their sixth son, a promising youth, aged

four, had been to some jam intended for the use of his elders, and smeared his little dumpling face with the sweet preparation ; for which he was soundly shaken, made to howl, and thoroughly scrubbed with a pocket handkerchief his nurse seemed provided with for the purpose ; whilst his mamma accompanied the process with shakes of the head, and a string of—"how dare yous"—naughty boys"—&c., which seemed to have a great effect on the child's nerves.

Presently, I saw Mr. Grey and his companion, and Captain Howard appeared to see them at the same moment, for he exclaimed :

"There's poor Grey doing the agreeable to that mathematically constructed young lady, if her mind is as angular as her body, their conversation won't run very smooth I fancy."

"I suppose it was an office he liked," I said, "as I should imagine it to be self-imposed."

"That's no rule, Miss Brand."

"How so ? it could not be obligatory ; he seems quite recovered from—from that accident," I remarked.

"Yes, pretty well, but he's not safe yet—requires care, more, I am sorry to say, than he gives to himself; and bachelors like he and I, unfortunate wretches! fare badly for nursing, without mother, sister, wife, or anybody to care a sou about one; indebted to a valet or a landlady for any attention one gets, I assure you an illness is an abominable business with us."

"You were very kind," I said, "to act as you did towards your friend; he says no brother could have been kinder than you were to him."

"Nonsense, he overrates it all, I did no more for him than he would have done for me any day; you don't know what a good fellow he is, Miss Brand; he is one of the kindest-hearted men I know; the most affectionate disposition—just calculated for domestic life, and whoever obtains him for a husband will be a very happy woman."

"Why does he not marry?" I asked, with a voice as calm as I could command.

"Eh?" and Captain Howard turning quickly round, looked at me. "Well, I don't

know—you ladies can best answer the question why there are so many bachelors ;” and he laughed. “ But one thing I can tell you respecting him ; and if you know any young lady who may have a predilection in his favour, you may assist her materially in working out her own happiness as well as his ; and it is this—that he is a man of refined mind and delicate feeling, but proud and sensitive—the ultra length of those good qualities—delicacy and refinement ; and I believe that to this unfortunate mental organisation, he owes his present position.”

“ Has he been jilted then ?” I asked, recklessly.

“ Jilted ! no, he’s not the man to stand that.”

“ Perhaps he is known as a male flirt, and avoided accordingly.”

“ Nothing of the kind, Miss Brand. You see you oblige me to take up the cudgels warmly in his defence ; but no man knows him better than I do ; and I wish him to be understood by others as well as he is understood by me. When I call him proud and sensitive, it is not in a disparaging manner

though I regret for his own sake that he should be so."

"Mr. Grey certainly has a very warm friend in you, Captain Howard."

"Yes, I'm not ashamed to say that I'm extremely fond of Grey, almost romantically so, and not without cause. I don't know where I should have been now, but for him—the Queen's Bench very likely. How many scrapes has he got me out of—how many a timely warning and piece of good advice can I recal to mind, for which I am indebted to him! A capital fellow he always was; and remembering all this, you know, Miss Brand—I—I don't like to see him teased, and kept on the rack. He doesn't deserve it; and the woman who would play fast and loose with him ought to be (to employ an elegant expression I once heard used by a respectable old groom) 'kicked to death by spiders'—a death for a fairy by the way."

To whom did my companion refer as the faithless fair one? I was quite mystified. Had the Lady Lucy been amusing herself at his expense? It seemed like it; but I could not put the question to Captain Howard.

Something tied my tongue upon the subject,
and I changed the conversation.

By-and-bye the repast was announced.

“ The table in fair order spread,
They heap the glittering canisters with bread;
Viands of various kinds allure the taste,
Of choicest sort and savour, rich repast.
* * * * *
Why sits Ulysses silent and apart,
Some word of grief close harboured at his heart?
Untouched before thee stand the cates divine,
And unregarded laughs the rosy wine.”

Mr. Grey looked very quiet and weary, and did not seem to enter into the spirit of the others, when we assembled in the rustic summer-house to partake of the little collation, champagne and so forth, there in “fair order spread.” He sat apart, as if it were too much trouble for him to make any exertion, and preferred being left to his own reflections.

I supposed he was thinking of the cruel Lucy. The want of joviality in him, however, was amply made up by the spirits of the rest of the party.

Lady Ravensden was merriment itself, and her son did all he could to promote cheerfulness amongst us.

Mr. Barleycrop flitted about from one to another, attending to the requirements of each, and Miss Rice, from some eccentric notion she entertained, thought it incumbent to follow in his wake, and moved restlessly hither and thither, instead of remaining in her place; the consequence was, that she was always coming in contact with the attendants, who wished that "jolly old gal would bide among the gentlefolks, and not come a-knocking the dishes out of their hands in that tempestuous way."

An affair of eating and drinking, however necessary and agreeable at the time, does not afford much pleasure in retrospection; there is an emptying and replenishing of plates and glasses, interrupted observations made first to your right-hand neighbour, then to the one on your left; pantomimic action to your friends opposite, and polite requests to the domestics at your back; it is not till hunger is appeased, and the animal wants are supplied, that the intellectual wakes, and sheds a more refined influence around.

Racy anecdotes are then told; your neighbour appears to take a deeper interest in

anything you have to say to him, then follows a call for music, and on the present occasion, we were happy in having a gentlemen of great musical talent—a German professor, of the party.

He maintained the honour of his Vaterland, in several popular and national songs, beginning with "Im Wald und auf der Haide," gliding off into tenderer themes in which "Mein Herz," was frequently introduced, accompanied by a pathetic placing of the hand upon that sensitive organ, and concluding with a patriotic song expressive of the feelings which warm the breast of the speaker, but into which we could not enter.

The half-pay major roared something very tremendous, understood by nobody, for which he was thanked very much; and then Miss Pauline Townsend Tomkins, was asked to sing; that young lady was about to comply, when her aunt interrupted her, by saying,

"Bless you, Polly doesn't sing; the child has no soul whatever, but I shall be very happy to oblige you, and do anything for the pleasure of the party. Dear me, though! there's no piano—what shall we do?"

There was, in truth, no piano, but a harp stood in one corner of the room, and it being known to some of the company that I played, it was speedily brought forward, and I found myself called upon to exercise my abilities.

Miss Tomkins, however, declared she couldn't sing to anything but a piano or an organ ; so yielding to the solicitations of the party, I touched the strings in accompaniment to myself.

During the few previous days, my thoughts had been darkly brooding—dwelling bitterly upon a sentiment which I found lurking in my heart, and these thoughts had taken the form of words which as most congenial to the state of my feelings, I breathed forth in the half-twilight.

The last beams of day were glimmering in through the crimson-tinted pane, the figures of the assembled people looked shadowy—I could almost fancy them spirits disembodied, and the ideal assumed the form of reality, as the mind thus deprived of distinct objects for contemplation, gazed with its spirit-eyes into the dreamy regions of fancy.

This was my Fantaisie,

“Love! dark-wing’d Love!
Offspring of sable night! *
Tracked in thy dusky flight,
Through a region cold and dreary,
By the shades that pale and weary,
There ever rove.

“Wherefore so fierce?
Boy of the sable plume!
While to the quiet tomb
Points thy deadly-poisoned arrow?
‘Mortal see!—yon chamber narrow
I cannot pierce!’”

I will not say that my feelings carried me the length of wishing that I might be laid in the tomb as a refuge from love.

I must do Isola Brand the justice to say, that nothing so absurd entered her brain as concerning herself personally.

She was merely viewing the matter in the abstract.

The song was encored—it seemed generally liked, though there was only one individual who was likely, besides myself, to enter into the spirit of it.

Miss Tomkins was pleased to express herself in terms of admiration of my performance.

* Cupid, the son of Nox and Erebus.

"I like your singing, Miss Brand," she said, "I see you've soul, but it's a pity you choose such sentimental songs; we are inundated with love already—such a pack of stuff as it is—makes me sick."

"Do the words you have just sung," asked a voice at my side, whose tones thrilled me, "express the view you take of the tenderest and sweetest of earthly passions, Miss Brand?"

"There is a sunny and a shadowed side to every object," I answered, "I have merely painted the side that is in the shade."

"I could not have imagined you knew anything of love's dark side."

I laughed—"It is excessively disagreeable, Mr. Grey, that people will always identify the singer with the song."

"But why," he persisted, "choose a song, embodying such a gloomy idea, if not in harmony with your feelings?"

"A woman's fancy," I answered with an indifferent air.

"Ah! there it is! 'woman's fancy' truly!" he exclaimed with bitterness of tone, "how many a man's happiness has been wrecked on

those dangerous quicksands ! but you, Isola—I mean Miss Brand, I thought you were above all the fanciful weakness of your sex.”

“I don’t know what could have given you that idea,” I said, “if anything, I’m more under the sway of fancy and caprice than most people.”

At this moment, Mr. Barleycrop came up to me, and commenced complimenting me upon my singing. Mr. Grey turned with some impatience from him, and from me.

“Thank you, thank you, how charming to be sure ! To think now that Miss Brand, to all her other incomparable charms should add that syren voice ! as if the others were not enough to turn a man topsy-turvy, without spinning one round and round by emotions inspired by the exquisite vibrations of sounds so heavenly—*so* heavenly ! ’pon my life now I assure you—I assure you, beautiful Miss Brand, I don’t know whether I’m standing upon my head, or upon my heels—now—now—my feelings are brimming over ; I feel in Elysium—I do—I do.”

Our host had evidently been imbibing, and the Epernay had taken effect.

Under cover of the darkness, I glided from him to join my old friend Lady Ravensden, and I saw Miss Rice quietly take my place.

Mr. Barleycrop unaware of my cavalier retreat, continued talking in an excited manner.

“Adorable creature!” he exclaimed, “you have waked ‘my better soul that slumbered’ to a state of feeling which I can only compare to the restless champagne imprisoned in yon crystal; the effervescence of my spirit knows no bounds, it will not be kept in check by the rules which generally influence it, and I must now declare my passion for the being this poor heart has learned to worship—to worship. Yes,” he continued, “you have played upon the strings of my heart, till in a grand diapason, it vibrates in my bosom, breathing a long wail of love; ‘C’est l’amour, l’amour, l’amour!’”

Thunderstruck at a declaration so passionate, Miss Rice was dumb, but she yielded her hand to the fond grasp of a lover, with a joy she had long wished to feel, and he continued—

“Soft hand, dear, soft hand, permit me to

imprint a kiss—a chaste kiss upon its delicate surface !

“ O, Arethusa, peerless nymph ! why fear
Such tenderness as mine ? ”

But you don't fear me ? now do you—do you ? ”

A tender squeeze was the only reply Miss Rice was capable of making.

“ There now, I knew there was sympathy between us, a responsive chord ready to be awaked at a gentle touch, and to think that it is my blissful lot to have aroused slumbering echoes in that heart. What is your name ? Arethusa, now isn't it ? it must be Arethusa. ”

“ No, my name is Constantia. ”

“ Constantia, bless me ! named after that delicious wine ; well now, if anything was wanting to complete the measure of my admiration and adoration, it was the knowledge of that sweet name ‘ Constantia ! ’ how many delicious sips that recalls ! ” and again he kissed her hand as he murmured in the language of Keats

“‘My river-lily bud, one human kiss!
One sigh of real breath—one gentle squeeze
Warm as a dove’s nest among summer trees.’

you must be ‘mine, Constantia; ‘pure as yon sky’s celestial blue,’ as the song beautifully expresses it, ‘my love shall be—my love shall be;’ tender, constant, true, you’ll ever find me, and when happy years have rolled by, we shall be able to exclaim in the words of another sweet ballad—We’ve lived and loved together—”

“And now you must dance together,” cried the voice of ‘Honest Hal,’ “for they’re clearing away the tables, and it is expected that ‘every man this night shall do his duty.’”

At this moment, a number of wax candles suddenly lighted up the building, and Mr. Barleycrop made a discovery of a nature not the most gratifying.

What that discovery was, the reader may easily imagine. Miss Rice also became aware of a rosiness of complexion in Mr. Barleycrop, which she had not observed before, and thinking to pay him a very pretty and elegant compliment, she ventured, though

her knowledge of the French language was somewhat limited, to tell him that she adored his "beautiful *couperosé* complexion," which made the poor man very uncomfortable, and inclined him to wish his flatterer in the depths of the Red Sea.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Woman is the lesser man, and all thy passions matched
with mine,
Are as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine."

LOCKSLEY HALL.

As we sat in the library the next morning, we discussed the events of the previous day, and we all agreed that we had been exceedingly amused; so much so, that we should like a repetition of the affair before the weather set in with severity, and rendered it impossible.

Presently Lord Ravensden exclaimed, while looking over the county paper.

"Here's something for you, mother—'Review of the Yeomanry—ball at the Town Hall afterwards.'"

"Hurrah!" cried the old lady, "just what I should like, nothing could have happened more *à-propos*—want something of the sort to enliven us; we shall go, of course."

"Give me the paper, George," said the young countess; her husband complied, and she forthwith turned to the announcement of the ball, with the list of stewards, &c.

"Will your ladyship honour it with your presence?" I asked.

"No! I think not, I hate these stupid provincial affairs, hum-drum things; it's a long drive too."

"But we can drive over in the morning," said his lordship, "dress there, and as we shall sleep at the hotel, it won't be such very great fatigue; I thought you wished the monotony of your life here, varied a little."

"No! I'm resigned to my fate, there's no use in battling with life, and I'm content to remain quiet till we go to Paris."

"Well, my dear, do as you like, I don't wish you to do anything which would be disagreeable or fatiguing, but your name's down among the lady patronesses, I hope."

"O yes!" she laughed, "they've taken good care of that."

The arrangements were soon made for our going, and we all began to look forward to this petty review and ball, as if it had been a really grand affair, so diminished became our views and ideas under the cramping influence of "country quarters."

It is quite singular how soon the mind contracts or expands under influences calculated to produce either effect; and this india-rubber-like tendency, is the cause of much of the inconsistency of character to which we can all more or less plead guilty. I was making a somewhat similar remark to Captain Howard one day when we were conversing together.

"Yes," he said, "I have often found that to be the case, and have been astonished at myself when quartered in Ireland, at some horrible out-of-the-world region; trifles of the most contemptible nature are sufficient to excite and amuse. One source of amusement, I remember, which was considered good fun at the time, was drawing imaginary likenesses of young ladies, and showing them to a fellow in the

regiment, with the assurance that each was a case of desperation and suicide on the part of the tender fair one ; he was an exceedingly vain man, and it used to put him to his wits' end to contrive methods of astonishing us with stories of his own conquests—he would give us tissues of lies of the most flagrant description, which set us roaring.

“Then there was another man who afforded us capital fun sometimes, or what, at least, we considered such at the time. He possessed a most unhappy temper, and was one of the meanest fellows imaginable, and the young dogs used to love to irritate him, and endeavour to induce him to bet ; and between his ‘waxiness’ as they were wont to call it, and his ‘screwiness,’ we managed to derive a fund of laughter from his society.”

“Poor man !”

“Ah ! woman-like ! pity any one you hear abused, but he was a surly bear-like animal, and under the influence of ‘blues’ engendered by the abominable weather, and the monotony of our mode of life, he grew quite savage in his disposition, and it became, at last, rather a dangerous thing to badger Hawkes.”

“Hawkes?” I exclaimed.

“Yes, do you happen to know him? I beg your pardon for mentioning him so disrespectfully if he’s a friend of yours.”

“Not a particular friend, but he married a young lady I know—Evelyn Compton, sister of Miss Compton who was at that memorable water-party.”

“Yes! I heard of it, though it was a mystery to me how it came about; what could possess a nice girl like that to marry Hawkes, I cannot imagine.”

“O, are you talking of Mrs. Hawkes?” said Mr. Grey who came up at the moment.

“Yes, doesn’t it puzzle you to think what mind she was in when she placed her happiness in the hands of that man?”

“No, it is only another instance of what ‘woman’s fancy’ is worth—but have you heard anything of them lately?”

“Yes, I saw them not long ago, he’s Major now, and we call him ‘Ursa Major,’ and when the couple is alluded to, it is as ‘Beauty and the Beast;’ she leads a sad life I’m afraid, they say so at least; but there’s no way at getting at the truth, for she’s such a true woman, she

won't say a word against her husband; she's a Griselda in patience—a sweet creature certainly."

"Must be, I should think," said Mr. Grey, "but it surprises me how her friends could allow the match to take place."

"Do you know so little of women as that, Grey? She bent like a reed when the storm of opposition came, but rose again more confirmed than ever in her blind belief as soon as it was past."

"And perhaps after all," remarked Mr. Grey, "she's happy in her thralldom, and wouldn't thank us for the pity we bestow on her—does he bully her much?"

"Well, you may call it bullying her when a woman dare not look this way nor that, for fear of being pulled up for it; his absurd jealousy carries him to lengths that must be very trying to his gentle wife sometimes. I have been assured that if a man looks at her, (and I defy any man to see her once without looking a second time) he is enraged beyond measure, and takes the poor thing to task, as if she could help it! It is a heavy tax for a woman to pay for beauty."

“ Ah ! but Howard, some women are too fond of being admired, and cannot resist the pleasure they feel in attracting men ; I don’t think Evelyn Compton is one of that sort, but still I don’t wonder at Hawkes watching her jealously.”

“ I don’t see that,” said ‘ Honest Hal,’ with much simplicity, “ the deuce is in it if a man can’t trust a woman who loves him.”

“ Ah ! but how is he to be sure of that ?”

“ Why, by her marrying him, of course.”

Mr. Grey shook his head.

“ What a suspicious fellow you are Grey ! Liberal, and large-minded in other things, you never can give a poor woman credit for sincerity, and that I call downright mean ; now when money is in the way, I’ll grant you there’s room for the shadow of a suspicion that you delude yourself in believing you are loved ; though, even then, disinterested kindness shown, and generosity, may awaken feelings which the mere merits or *personnel* of the man would not do ; (you’ll excuse me, Miss Brand, for so freely expressing my opinion upon you ladies), but when money has nothing to do with it, and something, very like a sacrifice is made for your

sake, why I think you're bound to believe you're loved, and treat your wife in all confidence accordingly."

"Not beyond a certain point, Howard ; you forget what a weak creature woman is, charming and adorable as I'll admit her to be ; she's fickle as the wind, veers round to every point of the compass in the shortest conceivable space of time, and if you confidingly and foolishly spread your sail to the changeful breeze, you find yourself, when least expecting it, being carried away to have your peace broken for ever on the Scylla of some direful event, and you sink into the Charybdis of disappointment and heart-weariness, a world-sick man."

Was it a proof of the spaniel-like nature of my sex, that I positively liked Mr. Grey the better for his calumny ?

I thought I should like to be schooled and scolded by him, but after all that had passed, of course I was not going to tell him so, I merely said :

" You seem to view us very meanly, Mr. Grey."

" Pardon me, Miss Brand—not meanly, but

mercifully. I see your extreme weakness, and would guard you from dangers which you do not, or will not see for yourselves ; it is the duty of the stronger to do so ; the man who does not guard his wife jealously as he would the richest treasure, is not worthy of possessing a really good one."

"But I maintain," said Captain Howard, "that a good one doesn't require all that guarding, and a woman of proper feeling would be extremely hurt at a system of espionage and distrustful watchfulness."

"Not a bit of it, if she know that she is loved and worshipped. It is flattering to her vanity, and pleasing to her self-love, to feel herself the object of anxiety, and heart-burning jealousy ; and she will most ruthlessly inflict any amount of torture upon a victim, to ascertain whether or not she can arouse these feelings, and if the result of her experiment, so coolly and scientifically made, be satisfactory, she will lay the flattering knowledge like balm upon her soul, when she discovers the extent of her power."

"You misjudge the nature of woman completely," I said, somewhat indignantly, "she

is not the selfish being you imagine her, nor is her conduct swayed by the base motives for which you give her credit."

"I am glad to hear you say so, Miss Brand, but I have yet to be converted to your belief—facts and experience weigh more with me than mere assertion."

He never used to talk in this bitter spirit, what possessed him now?

How I longed to convince him of his error! It was evident that that flirting Lady Lucy had given him a very bad opinion of us generally, and that under her influence he had become quite an altered man.

It was a great pity.

* * * *

In the course of the afternoon, Miss Rice was observed coming towards the house alone and on foot, and presently I was informed that that lady was in the drawing-room, and desirous of seeing me.

I immediately repaired to the apartment, and no sooner had I entered, than I found myself inclosed in a tight embrace, and receiving unnumbered kisses over my cheeks, lips and eyes.

“My dearest girl!” she cried, “congratulate me! I have something to tell you; I have experienced an amount of joy, of which I may have dreamt, but never had realized till now. But how shall I tell you the cause of my bewildering ecstasy? Maiden modesty refuses me the use of words to express my feelings; these tears,” and she wept, “may perhaps speak more (sob) than words, on this overwhelming occasion, (sob). My dear Miss Brand, don’t you envy me? I am loved! (a little hysterical laugh) loved! Ah! in such a delightful manner, that I assure you there was something almost tragical in his declaration; yes, it was dreadfully delightful; as I listened to it, I felt as if some great danger were impending, and almost held my breath in terror; but it was all true, all real, sincere, earnest, beautiful passion which the dear fellow felt for me, and it seems quite ungrateful of me to weep, or feel other than joyful, and thankful.”

“May I guess the name of your adorer, Miss Rice? Is it not Mr. Barleycrop?”

“Dear me—there now—I was afraid his devotion, so openly manifested, could be no secret; it was rather imprudent of him, dear

fellow, but when the heart loves, how can it conceal its emotions? I know I never could hide my feelings, although I always used to be called the pretty young gipsy girl, and you know gipsies are considered very sly. I prefer hanging my heart like my watch in sight, it saves trouble; but, my dear, don't you envy me?"

"I envy you any attachment that is reciprocal, if there is no bar to your happiness in any way."

"Bless you, my dear!"

"And Mr. Barleycrop really has proposed to you?" I said.

"Yes—oh, yes! he has asked me to be his, and oh! he expressed himself so beautifully on that delicate occasion! talking of the 'sky's celestial blue', and all that."

"Ah!" I said, "I think sky-blue is a favourite colour of his; if I remember rightly, his waistcoat was sky-blue yesterday."

"Was it really, are you sure? I'm glad you mentioned it, for I was going to buy a new bonnet, and intended it to be pink, but now I'll get one of celestial blue; he has such elegant taste in dress, that I shall have to study it a good deal."

"But, Miss Rice," I ventured to say, "is not this a rather hastily arranged affair? You met for the first time yesterday, did you not?"

"What of that my dear? are you so cold-blooded as not to know what love at sight is? Don't you recollect Romeo and Juliet, what a sudden affair that was? precisely the same as this, and I'm sure Mr. Barleycrop is as sensible, as handsome, and as beautifully dressed as ever Romeo could have been, you should have heard what he said to me, it was quite affecting! Oh! I couldn't be cruel to him for the world!"

It struck me that there was a slight mistake somewhere, but to tell a lady of the affectionate, susceptible nature of Miss Rice, that she had been deceiving herself—that she was indebted to the influence of Champagne for a declaration which had filled her with joy inexplicable, was too cruel a task for me to perform. I thought it better to trust to chance, or time for affording her enlightenment, and to do all in my power to bring about that "consummation devoutly to be wished" her union with Mr. Barleycrop; if it could be effected, it should be.

"How I wish you had a lover, dear!" exclaimed my kind friend with gushing enthusiasm, and tender consideration. "You cannot think how sweet it is to hear words such as he uttered, it went through me, and excited me so, I couldn't sleep all last night—thinking it over, and wanting you to know all about it."

"Have you told Mr. and Mrs. Oxenford of the state of affairs?" I asked.

"O, yes! and you can't imagine how astonished they are, wish me all manner of happiness, and say what a dear, delightful creature Barleycrop is. 'Mrs. Barleycrop,' do you think it sounds well?"

"Agricultural rather, but not objectionable."

"Croppy, I mean to call him as a pet name, 'dearest Croppy'—my beloved."

"There he is—driving up to the door," I cried, as I saw him turning amongst the laurel bushes.

"Dear me, dear me," exclaimed Miss Rice, "what shall I do? I put on my old cloak thinking it was going to rain—and this bonnet is so very unbecoming! I never dreamt of

seeing him here; hide me somewhere — I couldn't see him this figure—hide me, do!"

Before I could suggest any course of conduct to the agitated lady, she had concealed herself behind, or under a sofa, the draperies of which had scarcely done fluttering in consequence of this movement, before Mr. Barley-crop was announced.

He looked rather awkward, as if treading on uncertain ground, and his manner was subdued and deferential.

"I hope I see Miss Brand well? quite well? quite well?"

I gave him a satisfactory assurance on that point, and anxious to give the conversation a turn which would spare the feelings of my poor friend under the sofa, I began talking away very fast about the party of the previous day, saying how much we had all enjoyed it, how exceedingly well everything went off, and how greatly we all were indebted to the liberal proprietor of the grounds, for his kind attention, &c., &c.

"No—no—no! spare me, I beseech you! say no more, my *dear* Miss Brand; its having afforded you pleasure, however slight, repays

me sufficiently for any poor services I may have rendered—*poor* services !”

He sighed heavily, while he inflicted on me an unmitigated stare.

“And was Miss Brand really gratified at my humble endeavours to please ?” he said at length, smiling sweetly.

“Not Miss Brand alone,” I answered, “every one appeared delighted ; Lady Ravensden I know, enjoyed herself extremely, so did the Tomkinsons I should imagine, as well as the Oxenfords and their amiable friend Miss Rice.”

Mr. Barleycrop’s face fell at the mention of this name, and for a moment he was silent ; but recovering himself very soon, he said, drawing his chair nearer to mine, so near indeed, that I was obliged to draw back as he advanced.

“What a cruel fair one you are ! do you know that you almost broke my heart last night ? how could you leave me in so heartless a manner ? so heartless, it was cutting, ’pon my life, cutting,” and he made an endeavour to weep. “I want to speak, to explain, or, ’pon my soul, I shall be in a very awkward predicament.”

I suddenly discovered that I was very cold, and that the fire was almost out.

"This room is so chilly, Mr. Barleycrop," I remarked, "that I must beg you to walk into the breakfast-room, it is so cozy there, we call it the snugger." "

"Certainly, certainly, by all means, we shall be more private there, perhaps, less likely to be interrupted, charming modesty, sweet, retiring delicacy!"

On arriving at the breakfast-room, to my great satisfaction, I found Lady Ravensden, *mère*, sitting there, and to her I confided my visitor; for having informed her of the ludicrous manner of the gentleman on the previous day, I knew that in her clever way, her ladyship would bring him to his senses with regard to his affected fancy for myself; so, slipping out of the room, when I saw him fairly afloat in a conversation with the dowager, I hastened back to poor Miss Rice.

I found her fluttering about like a caged bird in the drawing-room, and endeavouring to smooth her rumpled feathers.

"Was ever anything so unfortunate?" she cried on my entrance, "to think that I should

have been so stupid as to forget that I might possibly see dear Barleycrop, and that I should have put on this old cloak and bonnet ; but do you know dear, I assure you that when I heard the mellifluous flow of his beautiful voice, though I could not distinguish the words, and it was only the tone I heard, it was as much as I could do to remain under the sofa ; that sweet lingering tone, it was almost too much for me ! Now, I think I'll be off before the rain comes, it's very likely he'll be calling, and I'd better go home and make myself tidy a little ; so good-bye."

I advised her to wait till he was gone, which she did, and then sallied forth at a brisk pace, in the hope of reaching home and adorning herself in a more tasteful manner before the expected visitor should arrive.

Report hath it, however, that while proceeding down the bye-lane, which in consideration of the old cloak and unbecoming bonnet, Miss Rice chose as being the most retired way, she was surprised by a phaeton driving up behind her ; the gay colour of her habiliments startled the horse in the carriage, Miss Rice screamed shrilly, and rushing

frantically about, was in danger of being knocked down, when Mr. Barleycrop recognized the fair creature, and in magnanimous forgetfulness of the "*couperosé*" compliment, spoke to her soothing words of kindness, and offering her "a lift," which she blushing accepted, he drove her home to her friends the Oxenfords.

Miss Rice afterwards said of this short journey, that had not her feelings of gratification been balanced by the painful consciousness of her dress being so unbecoming, they would have been too much for her; as it was, they were quite enough for the little lady.

What Mr. Barleycrop's sentiments were, was revealed in the course of events, but at the time, mystery on this point afforded me much matter for speculation.

END OF VOL II.

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